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Mushi, Eyeball and a Chocolate Parfait

Color Illustrations

Start: The Girl Carrying a Head

28-year-old Minazuki Natsuko was the owner of the cafe Indian Bar in the shopping district. She opened this cafe three years ago, and the place was almost always completely deserted aside from a few regulars, possibly due to the gloomy atmosphere. However, Natsuko, remaining expressionless and silent to the point where people began to think that she was a decorative doll in the shop, continued with this unprofitable business. Furthermore -

“Heehee.”

No one could tell what she was happy about, but every small thing would make her laugh.

Spring was a time when people assimilated into society and when students assimilated into schools; it was a time when people began a new life.

Just about everything about the season came too abruptly, ever-changing as if in defiance to humanity’s will, leaving people with no time to prepare. Sometimes, there were people who could not keep up and tried instead to confirm their own existences through odd actions.

Basically, “There are weird people”, “Oh, that’s because it’s spring”, that kind of thing.

She’s also one of the people who turned strange because of spring’s witchcraft, Natsuko thought as she looked at a girl who had been in the cafe for two hours already.

“Nom nom nom, slurp slurp, mmm.”

She was probably a high school student, though she acted and felt more childish than she appeared, and even her clothes were childish, so it was hard to determine her actual age.

The most prominent part of her bizarre outfit was the hat she wore - one with giant round ears on top - over brown hair tied into two short pigtails. Another oddity was the curled tail hanging from her bottom. Further, though it was warm, her clothes were still too thin for early spring, showing her belly and thighs, though she also wore

needlessly large, out-of-place gloves.

It truly was a strange outfit, something that seemed like cosplay.

“Gulp, nooom nooom… Nom.”

For some unknown reason, this girl made bold onomatopoeias while she gleefully ate Indian Bar’s super-large sweet chocolate parfait that was rumoured to be sweet enough to kill a man. This chocolate parfait was one that made even dessert-loving high school girls surrender halfway through. However, the girl already had three empty cups in front of her.

“Oooom.”

With an angelic smile, the girl brought her spoon to her mouth, and making that same noise she put the chocolate and fresh cream in her mouth. Then, with a slight shake of her body, she lowered her head for a while before quickly raising her face, red with excitement, enthusiastically shouting, “Mmm-”

“Bang, bang bang”, she noisily knocked on the table.

“Mmm, mm! Mmm — it’s so awesome! DELICIOUS! It’s sweet and it tastes so good!”

“Oom”, “Ooom”, with joy on her face she ate, one bite after another.

“Aah, the cherries are chewy, the cornflakes are crispy, the thick chocolate and fresh cream makes an unbelievable taste - Is it God? Is it an angel? Who could it be? Who could made food this wonderful-”

The girl stroked her cheeks with hands in giant gloves and wriggled about.

“Nooooo. My brain will melt if I eat this.”

It would have been fine if she just ate it normally, but she kept making strange sounds to herself; such a troublesome customer. But there weren’t any other customers today, and she only made noises without causing trouble. It might be okay to leave her be.

Or so Natsuko thought to herself as she squinted at the girl eating the chocolate parfait.

Speaking of the parfait…how could someone possibly eat so much of that stuff?

That thing was triple the size and sweetness of any chocolate parfait found in a normal cafe, and she'd only placed it the menu as a joke - well, half a joke. Yet, this girl was eating parfaits non-stop - a worrisome sight indeed. Had she lost her sense of taste? It wouldn't be odd to get diabetes after a single cup of that stuff - even those who weren't doctors would be worried!

Furthermore, she would make a strange gesture every once in a while.

Sometimes, she would take a spoonful of cream or chocolate and bring it to her stomach rather than her mouth.

A place like that obviously would not have a mouth; normally, she would just be getting herself dirty. But when she brought her spoon back to the parfait, what was on it before would have mysteriously disappeared.

That wasn't all. She would occasionally put the spoon in her backpack, which she had placed on the seat next to hers.

"Mmm, sis, you wanna try some? It's a new taste, a new flavor, a new experience; a triple pleasure for you to enjoy."

Her spoon swayed as she said those incomprehensible words, but unlike when she brought the spoon to her stomach, the cream in the spoon did not disappear.

Noting this, the girl puffed her cheeks and unhappily put the spoon in her mouth.

"Really, you're like this every time. You'll never taste anything good if you're so picky."

Suddenly, Natsuko noticed someone else's response seemed to be mixed in the girl's innocently mumbling.

"Ki-chan, I'm not like you, I've long since lost any enjoyment in eating. Besides, if I ate that thing - which I can tell is too sweet just by looking at it - I'd get sick. Mmm…though, even if I get sick, this body would immediately restore itself."

"Then you want some?"

The girl smiled and laughed, and dug her spoon into the parfait, scooping up a big helping of cream. But a cold voice rejected her.

“Who’d want that! I have been freed from activities like eating and drinking, which allow so many impurities to enter my body - for that, I am thankful from the bottom of my heart. And again, Ki-chan, didn’t I tell you to not talk to me in public? I hate disobedient children.”

Hearing those words, the girl’s face suddenly turned white, and she desperately shook her head. Tears appeared in the corners of her eyes.

“No, no… Sis, don’t hate me. I’m sorry, I just wanted you to eat something tasty.”

“I know. Ki-chan, you’re a considerate child.”

Those were whispers that could not be detected by a normal person’s sense of hearing. But Natsuko heard them, and she furrowed her eyebrows.

This voice was…

“Actually, our luggage still isn’t ready, right? Stop indulging in food, and let’s hurry up and go home!”

“Alright, sis. Just one more bite - Aahm.”

The girl scooped up the remainder of the fresh cream and sent it down her mouth with an enchanted smile.

“Ah - this is great. The moment it’s in my mouth, it’s like being in heaven. Mm, I’m gonna come here again.”

The girl spoke to herself, and stood up in high spirits. Then, like a small animal, she ran to Natuko who silently watched her. Placing her hand on the counter, she giggled as she said, “The bill, please.”

Natsuko nodded, took out the bill and smoothly tapped at the register. Extra-large chocolate parfaits were rather expensive, and the girl had four, so the price would obviously be extremely high.

“It comes to 5400 yen in total.”

“Whoa…” The girl’s eyes opened wide, and she poked her head.

“I ate too much, I need to reflect a bit… is this enough?”

With a rustle, the girl searched in her backpack. She was probably looking for her wallet, and Natsuko tried not to look in; but in that situation, it was impossible to hide.

Natsuko looked at the bag, and gasped after seeing what was inside.

“…”

A head.

It was a human head.

A female head. The bone-chilling head was turned backward, so its face could not be seen. But Natsuko knew, she understood, and she went on guard.

This head, this woman was —

“Ooh, I found it!” The girl slapped a bundle of notes on the counter, seeming to not notice Natsuko’s state.

A bundle of money?

“Keep the change.”

Saying so, the girl briskly turned around. If those were 10,000 yen bills, then there would have been a hundred thousand, or possibly even a million yen. Natsuko calmly picked up the thick bundle of money and inspected it.

The top and bottom were two notes worth a thousand yen.

Everything else was folded-up newspaper.

“…”

“…”

As Natsuko looked at the stack of newspaper, the girl stopped walking. Probably realizing that she had been caught, she once again searched in her bag and took out a cute wallet, and she pulled out three thousand-yen bills and some change.

“Sorry.”

Natsuko did not respond, and operated the register with a “Ding”.

“I always thought you were a foolish child, but Ki-chan, you’re really an idiot. What was that back there? Don’t embarrass me, okay?”

“It was because… because, I wanted to try it out. I wanted to try acting like a rich person.”

The girl cried and wailed in her home as she tried to explain. It was a room in a lonely old apartment reached by crossing the street from Indian Bar and going all the way down the poorly maintained road.

The narrow room lacked anything of interest. There was no furniture, with unopened cardboard boxes strewn all around.

As she used the room’s gas stove to cook hotpot, the girl pouted. Though she was inside, she did not remove her hat or gloves. “Because I’m a girl, sometimes I wanna pretend to be rich.”

“I can’t understand you at all. Whatever, we can worry about that later. Why did you want to move into this apartment?”

Like before, the voice came from the backpack placed to the side. The girl turned to look at the backpack that rolled on the ground, giving an angelic smile.

“Well, obviously, it’s to look for sis’s body and also the Greater Fragment that was stolen.”

The girl tossed the soba noodles she just bought from a convenience store into the boiling water, and stirred with long chopsticks. The large bowls, long chopsticks, and disposable chopsticks had all been taken out of the cardboard boxes first.

“Sis had it tough. If I didn’t find you at the hospital, you would’ve been killed by The Weakest. Since I’m a horrible match for The Weakest, I ran away — But next time I’ll definitely take her head-on and take back your Fragment.”

“That’s too dangerous.” That concerned voice said, “Ki-chan, The Weakest is cunning. Even if you’re the invincible Unpleasant Counter-Current -”

The girl smiled, and beat eggs into the pot. “Really sis, you keep treating me like a little kid. No problem, I’ll be careful. Just wait like you’re about to go on Noah’s Ark.”

“That analogy’s rather disturbing.”

The girl smiled at the signing voice and put the finished soba noodles into a large bowl. She covered it with plastic wrap and placed disposable chopsticks on it. Then, with a nod and a “Mmm” sound, she picked it up with gloved hands.

“Besides — we have plenty of time. I think The Weakest is only good at running away. It won’t be easy to find her, so I decided to move into this apartment to look for the one who attacked you… was it Gankyū?”

“Gankyū Eguriko?”

“Right, I wanna find that Gankyū person. She was the one who gouged out sis’s heart and took away the Greater Fragment. Even if she doesn’t know where your body is, she might just happen to know the whereabouts of the Fragment.”

The girl smiled, and with unsteady steps brought out the steaming bowl.

“To achieve this goal, I decided to infiltrate Gankyū‘s high school as a student. Though I’ve been classified as dead a long time ago and don’t have any documentation, that kind of thing is simple. I can just use the fragment’s power to twist reality a little.”

Inside this girl resided a power called a “Fragment of God”, so she could do things like this.

But this didn’t really make the girl special. Whether it was a Greater Fragment or one of the Lesser Fragments known as “Apples”, pretty much anyone with a Fragment could do things like this.

Those with Fragments had the world’s blessing.

If one wished, infiltrating a school or company would be easy. As for the reason, even the girl wasn’t too sure.

It was like — one only needed to go to someone important in the

school and say, “I want to attend this school starting tomorrow”, and it would be treated as a routine enrollment.

That girl with an incomprehensible name, Gankyū Eguriko, had probably used this ability of the Fragments to enter school.

Thinking of this while making sure not to spill the bowl, the girl opened the door. From the backpack left behind came a worried voice.

“Wait, Ki-chan, where are you going?”

“I’m bringing soba noodles to our neighbors and letting them know we’ve recently moved in. It’s Japan’s wonderful custom.”

“Heehee”, she laughed and closed the door with her hands in the giant gloves.

Though it was spring, it was still cold at night.

After cutting off her sensory neurons, the girl knocked on the door of the third-floor apartment next to hers. “Nageki” was written on the nameplate, with the strange words “Currently imprisoning a beautiful girl” underneath.

“Excuse me - ” She knocked on the door with one hand while holding onto the bowl with the other. She felt a human presence behind the door but no one came to answer her, as if pretending to be out. The girl was confused, and after deciding to meet this neighbor later she went down a floor. After all, if she didn’t hurry, the soba noodles would get cold.

This building had three floors, with two apartments each. The second floor seemed to have at one point been an office for some business, but now it was empty with a “Bankrupt” sign on the door.

“‘Bankrupt’… They should’ve used a more tactful term.”

So the girl mumbled to herself, as she went down to the first floor - which should still be occupied. The floor had two rooms: a room A and a room B. The nameplate on room B said “Breaksun Hanselmine”. The girl knocked - but there was no response.

Another one pretending to be out! Why didn’t anyone want to answer the door? Thinking how annoying it was, the girl frowned.

Room A was her last hope.

She walked to the door with a nameplate simply saying “Usagawa” while the old washing machine next to her clanked and rumbled rather loudly.

“Hello - “

She pressed the doorbell that her own room did not have, resulting in a “Dong - ” like a clock’s chime. The bell’s sound pierced the dusk, and birds resting on power cords were frightened away by the noise.

After a while, the door was opened slowly.

“Ah — “

Out came a girl who seemed lost. Her beautiful pink hair was adorned with a cute butterfly knot, while her slightly disordered clothes showed her collarbone.

Did she just get up? The girl looked ahead of her, thinking.

“Uuuum…”

Looking closely, the girl made a moaning noise as she mechanically tilted her head.

Seeing that, the girl wearing the round-eared hat frowned slightly.

“Meat… Doll.”

“Who is it?”

Suddenly, a tall youth appeared behind the stupefied girl.

His handsome appearance was breathtaking. With blond hair and blue eyes, his features seemed to be a work of art. But the dark rings under his eyes diminished his beautiful looks and a short, out-of-place stubble had grown on his face.

This haggard-looking man looked out the door with suspicion.

The girl was perplexed and stepped back slightly, and then introduced herself with a bow while holding out the bowl.

“I just m-moved over and I came to introduce myself. These are soba noodles to announce my arrival here.”

“I see…”

Seeming like he recalled something, the youth calmly received the bowl. He also pulled back his hand, which was stretched towards a shelf in the entrance aiming for an object resembling a pistol, and his expression softened.

“The landlord announced it. Are you the one who moved to the third floor? I was only cautious because of that surname… but she’s not that person? No, I still can’t be careless.”

“Eh?”

As this incomprehensible monologue confused the girl, the youth sincerely introduced himself. “My name is Sakaki Guryū, and due to some circumstances I’ve moved into her - Usagawa Rinne’s home. As you can see, she’s a bit unwell, and might act a bit strange, but please don’t mind her. Hey, milady, greet her.”

“Greet her.” The girl who was called “milady” repeated the words like a child, and imitated a smile. “Hello.”

“Say ‘Nice to meet you’.”

“Nice to meet you — “

Though she already figured out the truth about the girl from her movements, the other girl pretended not to notice and nodded.

“Pleasure to meet you, Sakaki-san, Rinne.”

Then she bowed deeply and stated her name.

Her tail swayed with her body, and her hair also fluttered.

“My name is Saibara Mitsuki.”

Night 1: Black Dragon Black Snake Black Rat

(Omitted) — Earlier, we discussed how many of the myths and tales in this world share similarities, and the universal ideas underlying them all. Here, I want to emphasize again that the similarities and common ideas between those myths come from the fact that the basic human psyche (the subconscious, or you could say the original ego) is the same for everyone.

One need only spend a day being human, and one would share those universal ideas (this is what I have, up to today, called "God"). Those universal ideas, obviously, are inseparable from human biological developments: being born, growing up, becoming old and dying.

Thought and body are both unable to escape maturation and deterioration. Just so, people created "God" over and over, and "myths" grew prevalent. And because we are human, despite a few differences, they were all basically the same.

For proof, and to clarify, I have organized the "Seven Properties of God" that I just discussed, that can also be called the "Seven Universal Items of Myths". Even though these are present in every type of myth, let's use the Christian Bible as an example, considering this may be a difficult concept to understand.

1. Single Room/Genesis. (God creates the world. The birth of the world.)

2. Sterilization Disinfection/The legend of Noah's flood. (God is lost. Failure in creating the world → Reconstruction.)

3. Catastrophe/Tower of Babel. (God's lesson. Paradise is lost.)

4. Unpleasant Counter-current/Angel. Sodom and Gomorrah. (God's judgement. Karmic retribution and humanity's resultant suffering.)

5. Tear Song/Moses and the Ten Commandments. The Savior. (Setting the commandment, heavenly revelation, miracles, prophet.)

6. The Weakest/Devil. False prophet. (Neither a lesson nor a judgement. God's attack on humanity.)

7. God Mushi Emperor/Mark of the beast. Armageddon. (The final

battle, end of the world.)

Every “myth” can be classified as one of the above. These seven categories represent God’s different personas as He rules this world, sometimes kind, sometimes harsh.

What I fear though is that these seven existences act as “God’s personas”, not “God” Himself. Earth has long ago lost the conscious being known as “God”. We merely see a ghost of “God” through those seven personas.

Eternal life, the salvation of mankind, or miracles wrought by individuals; none of these things exist anymore. We have no recourse, no way to escape fate’s torrents — (Omitted)

— “The Unified Structure of God and Me” by Akutagawa Shirayuki, student of Class 1-D of Kajōya Prefectural High School

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“So annoying.”

Takamikado Mitaka - this peculiar name belonged to an average high school student in society, one who wore the uniform of Kannonsakazaki Private High School and had no outstanding traits.

That was clear — at least, it should have been this way.

“Mitaka, did you get the notice? I will also be studying at this school starting in April.”

It was lunch break in the area behind the Kannonsakazaki Private High School’s dark main buildings. Just as Mitaka decided to eat in this deserted place, a girl said this to him.

Her clothes stood out in this place sullied with countless graffiti, grime and moss. Though Kannonsakazaki High School required students to wear its uniform, she wore everyday clothes in disregard

of this rule. A black western-style dress adorned with a black ribbon; her gorgeous clothes and her cute, childish face didn't quite go together.

"Surprisingly, you have not come to pay your respects to me, the black dragon. Mitaka, have you no self-consciousness as a servant?"

She should have been —

"Mitaka" tried to remember, and recalled the name of the black-clothed girl who stood by leisurely.

"Kuroki Tatsue."

"Oh my, how arrogant, you dare call me directly by name?"

Kuroki Tatsue frowned, and held her black fan over her mouth. "Even considering that you are my childhood friend, and that you are older than I am, I would never permit you to address me by name! The Takamikado family are servants under the Kuroki family; have you forgotten that you have always been my servant? Mitaka, I am outraged!"

"Mitaka" remained silent, pulled out the raw egg that he bought from the convenience store as his lunch and put it in his mouth without even breaking it open. *Crack.* Even though it broke in his mouth, he calmly swallowed the thick liquid as well as the eggshell.

He thought back while eating his meal. No — it was more like flipping through a book, reading through the memories of the Takamikado Mitaka he had eaten — through the memories of the young man whose skin he wore. His childhood memories. Being badly injured after Tatsue kicked him down the stairs, being forced to do homework, and in the name of playing doctor having his belly cut open by Tatsue who was never fazed.

But they weren't all hateful memories that would send chills through people.

Saying "The little bird I raised is dead", Tatsue had cried in Mitaka's chest; she had sneaked into Mitaka's servant rooms in the wealthy Kuroki home and acted like a spoiled child, saying "I can't sleep after seeing a scary movie"; she had said to him with an innocent smile, "Mom praised me for my grades" -

Staying by that girl's side, he had watched her mature while

developing a sense of inferiority due to his own unchanging self. He was jealous of Tatsue, he felt so inferior — and yet he loved her deeply.

His feelings were a disgusting mix of love and hatred.

The young man named Takamikado Mitaka seemed to gloomily love Kuroki Tatsue, and when reading his daily thoughts it was hard to differentiate between curses and loving thoughts towards Tatsue. “Mitaka” sighed.

While eating the physical body, had he also consumed the soul? It was extremely troublesome, for he was now affected by Mitaka’s thoughts and memories — he too had special feelings toward Tatsue.

“Kuroki Tatsue.”

He called out, and Tatsue immediately turned red and angrily replied, “You addressed me by —!”

“You should stop associating with me.”

“Mitaka“‘s eyes shone with golden light…just like a reptile’s.

“I am not the Takamikado Mitaka whom you know.”

“What… do you mean?” Kuroki Tatsue showed her bewilderment.

As the eldest daughter of the Kuroki family, a branch family of the Sakaki Organization that controlled the world with its wealth, she had not once been disobeyed by the lowly servant Mitaka. That childhood friend who wasn’t manly in the least, who had neither confidence nor decisiveness and was always trembling in fear, should not have had this kind of courage.

But, Tatsue had always waited for this. From the past up to the present, she had waited for this boy named Takamikado Mitaka. For Tatsue, who spent her life being trained in the giant Kuroki family holdings and lacked a happy childhood, he — was her only companion.

— Mitaka, you must marry me one day.

— Right, Tatsue, I will become an amazing man and marry you.

They had made such an innocent promise. That was when they were younger, before they understood anything. For Tatsue back then, the Kuroki holdings were her entire world, and the only male of her age in that narrow world was Mitaka.

Girls remember past events more clearly than boys. No matter what, Tatsue could not forget that precocious promise, and not knowing better, thought it was the same for him.

The result was betrayal.

She was betrayed over and over again.

Mitaka's such a liar, what was that about becoming an amazing man from so long ago? He's just becoming more and more useless and addicted to video games and otaku manga. His grades aren't good, he's physically completely inept, and even his face is incredibly average.

Because of this, Tatsue would frequently take out her anger on Mitaka, hoping he would react by working to improve himself. But it was meaningless, nothing changed, and she ended up being betrayed again and again.

Soon enough, Tatsue shook off these kinds of feelings, and stopped putting hope in him.

That was how it should have been.

"Mitaka."

Tatsue noticed her quickening heartbeat as she looked at the childhood friend that she had not seen for a long time. The person in her memories — had messy hair, dressed weirdly, wore glasses that old people wore and was always downcast.

But the person in front of her — didn't seem quite the same. How should she put it, this… how should she put it?

Handsome?

"Don't make jokes like that —"

With how things had been, how could she have feelings for Mitaka

again? This was a mistake, a trap for her to be betrayed yet again.

But, but —

Perhaps he had dyed his straight hair, as the light color was quite beautiful. With a bit of gold, his strange eyes were bewitching. He looked straight at her without any timidity, yet spoke quietly as if he were whispering. He was captivating.

Tatsue couldn't stop her face from turning red, and shook her head firmly. What was she thinking?

"You are too arrogant, Mitaka! In front of I, the Black Dragon, who will one day defeat Guryū-onii-san and control the world, what kind of expression is that? Those rebellious eyes! And those kinds of words!"

"That's why I said -" Mitaka sighed in exasperation, not fearing Tatsue's threatening attitude in the least. "Man, didn't you understand me? Really - it's because of things like this that I think humans are annoying. Stuff like interpersonal relationships is too much for me."

He mumbled those confusing words, as he looked over at her with pupils that each contained a vertical golden slit.

"Tatsue, I doubt I can explain this well, so I won't talk too much. You, you're really better off cutting off contact with me. This world domination, black dragon stuff, no matter how much you brag you're just a normal human. A normal person shouldn't get associated with the world where I live."

Then, he added in a soft voice to himself: "I don't want to see Tatsue getting hurt and feeling pain because of me."

"Eh —"

Because of these profound words, Tatsue was red up to her ears. What was the matter? It hit the nail on the head, or perhaps it was more accurate to say the mood was getting dangerous. What was with this fascinating behavior, completely unlike his past self?

"Wh-what do you mean?"

What's this, not wanting to see me hurt because of Mitaka? He's worrying about me, treating me as something precious? Wh-why?

Tatsue's mind fell into a chaotic mess incapable of clear thought.

I'm being weird today. It's all Mitaka's fault.

In order to know more about her elder brother, Sakaki Guryū, the heir of the Sakaki Organization and the person she will have to defeat, Tatsue started to attend Kannonsakazaki High School, where Sakaki taught, from this spring. Tatsue had long known that Mitaka was a student at this school, and though she was sure that no miracle could have occurred, she called him out to check his growth.

And now Tatsue was bewildered.

Her confusion was caused by Mitaka's astonishing change.

"Do you get it?" Mitaka held his hand to his chest, speaking sincerely, "Takamikado Mitaka truly cares about you. If you were to be harmed, even I'd feel his pain."

"Ah. Ah -"

Thanks to these love-confession-like words, Tatsue giddily stepped backwards.

Was it a dream? Or reality? Her hopeless childhood friend had become so impressive, and even said he valued her - what was going on? Was - was it some kind of trap?

Tatsue looked around her, turning suspicious.

Mitaka watched Tatsue without saying a word. Tatsue wasn't accustomed to and couldn't stand that kind of tense atmosphere, and pointed at him with her fan, "D-don't look down on others, al-alright?"

She was too disturbed to even speak properly. Tatsue knocked on her head and seriously looked at Mitaka. *How can I be disturbed by a small thing like this? One day, I will control the world. Stay calm, stay calm…*

Inhale. Exhale. After breathing deeply, Tatsue opened her fan with a flap. "I hope you will refrain from insulting me, Mitaka. To be honest, I still cannot understand what you were saying, but -"

Tatsue hastily used formal language to hide her loss of calm, and

narrowed her eyes, “I am not a weak woman who requires your protection! No - I can prove it to you right here!”

More accurately, I want to prove it.

I want to show my strong side and make him, who’s being expressionless for some reason, smile and praise me. Upon noticing where her thoughts were going, Tatsue again turned red. She thought *What in the world is wrong with me today?* and shook her head.

Had those words reached Mitaka? Maybe he was on some sort of special treatment, swallowing that egg whole, and he was currently looking hungrily at a small bird perched on a nearby tree.

“What is it?” His expression seemed inhuman, almost…‘reptilian’ was the best way to describe it. But thinking about that could come later.

“Mitaka, look.” Kuroki Tatsue had recently discovered this supernatural ability.

After watching something on television, she had decided it would be fun to try using her mind to levitate her teddy bear. When nothing happened a few attempts later she felt foolish, and in the end just fluttered her fan and shouted, “Fly!”, as —

It flew.

The teddy bear was blown upward.

The brother who was not related to Tatsue by blood, and whom she needed to defeat, was a perfect being. Though Tatsue herself had a certain amount of artistic skill and studying ability, her brother was on a completely different level. With a PhD, an Olympic gold metal, and fame throughout the artistic world, his talent eclipsed hers by an incomparable degree.

Naturally, he was the heir to the Sakaki Organization, while Tatsue was merely a “spare”. But just as Tatsue started to despair over this, her ability awakened.

Brother definitely can’t do something like this - this is my only advantage over him.

She wasn’t sure how her ability worked, nor did she know why or how she’d suddenly gained it.

But, for Tatsue, that ability was the only thing which she could proudly show to the world as the proof of her existence. “Mitaka, I don’t know what you’re so worried about, but no matter who becomes your enemy, no matter what happens, I, the Black Dragon, will magnificently help you to triumph!”

So - watch carefully, and praise me.

Acknowledge me.

And as her feelings were about to burst, Tatsue rapidly fanned her fan.

“Like this!”

Her long black hair rose up with the wind, and instantly - a cyclone appeared in front of Tatsue.

This caused Mitaka, who had his back to Tatsue, to finally pay attention, turning to stare at her with wide eyes. Seeing that poker face finally crack a little, Tatsue smiled smugly. “Ohohoho! Look at this mystery! This power! This is the mighty breath of a dragon!”

In front of Tatsue, the cyclone picked up fallen leaves as it advanced directly toward the giant tree planted behind the school.

Struck by the wind, its branches and leaves rustled and shook, the thick trunk cracked. Even the ground rumbled fiercely.

Suddenly-

“Whooaa -” came a sharp voice. *Crash* - Something fell down.

“Huh?”

Tatsue, who was starting to get full of herself, came back to her senses thanks to the unexpected event. She stared at the object that had fallen - a girl with her limbs outstretched and seeing stars.

A girl, it was a girl. After Tatsue had assaulted the tree using wind without warning, a girl fell down as if she was a little insect.

“Waaah. It hurts, it really hurts! Why?”

The girl suddenly got up. She wore a conspicuous hat with round ears attached and a curled up tail. With tears in her eyes, she started complaining. “Why? Why, why? What just happened? My

afternoon nap was so peaceful, so why'd you bother me? Waaaahh, hyaa!"

Tatsue noticed that her right foot was bent in an unnatural direction. However, with a "crack" she twisted it back in place and easily stood up.

"Wah… Mmm? Who are you guys?"

The girl was startled. Her eyes opened wide, she seemed to be contemplating something. Perhaps unable to understand, she properly stated her name.

"As I am summoned, I shall gallop to present myself. Dundundundun ~ I am the unparalleled Unpleasant Counter-Current - Saibara Mitsuki."

"…"

"…"

In front of the girl holding a perfect pose, Tatsue and Mitaka were speechless.

They had no clue what she was saying.

There really were too many incomprehensible things, "Mitaka" sighed inwardly. He thought Takamikado Mitaka was just an ordinary student, so how could there be so much weirdness surrounding him?

And - as "Mitaka" suspected, could the world itself be losing its order?

"Mitaka" thought back to when he became "Mitaka".

It happened about a week before.

It was a coincidental opportunity.

"Mitaka" liked the night. It was tranquil, and more importantly, there were very few people.

For beings like “Mitaka”, humans were merely food; however, about half a year ago - after being tortured by that person, “Mitaka” tried to avoid contact with people.

“Mitaka“‘s original form was that of a black snake.

Just as he was skulking in the darkness, enjoying a late-night walk - he heard a sharp scream. A human. “Mitaka” didn’t care if a human was about to die, or if someone suffered pain. But when humans approached death, it was likely for them to obtain an “Apple” that granted immortality.

And it was rather easy to snatch “Apples” away from humans who had just gained them. If he was lucky — “Mitaka” thought like this, and in the end his greed carried him over to look.

He should have ignored that scream.

There was a monster, and a boy.

The monster glowed with a silver light; it was an ominous being. Generally, it took a form similar to humans, but its body was not made of flesh; rather, it was formed of sharp blades. Only its fiery red tongue looked organic as it stuck out, covered with saliva.

Recently, more and more beings called monsters had come to the town, and “Mitaka” knew this. Compared to humans or ordinary snakes, “Mitaka” was an existence much more similar to monsters. He knew that monsters, beings that wait eagerly in the other world invisible to humans and occasionally appear to cause trouble or to endanger humans, were indeed multiplying. Though he wasn’t particularly interested, the amount of victims should have increased.

The boy was one of those poor victims.

“Mitaka” at the time still did not know that the boy’s name was Takamikado Mitaka.

“Grrr, sssssssss.”

Maybe the silver monster was satisfied with its kill, as it made an interesting sound and left.

But it didn't eat him, merely leaving him dead.

This was rare for monsters, and it was more akin to human crime, but at the time "Mitaka" didn't find it strange.

"Mitaka" climbed onto a lamppost, and stared steadily at the teenager.

"I don't want to die…" He moaned, and sobbed with grief. "Mitaka" perfectly understood that sentiment, but his wounds reached his internal organs, and he would die for sure.

"I don't wanna die, I don't wanna die…" He struggled in pain.

"Why?"

"Mitaka" couldn't help asking. "Mitaka" also wanted to deny death, but why? Why did he want to live forever? Half a year ago that frightening girl had asked him that, yet "Mitaka" had no answer. From then on, he had constantly felt lost.

Why did he seek eternal life?

Was it just as the girl said - did he only want to fulfill his ancestors' dying wish, and gain the praises of those already in Heaven?

It seemed the slowly-dying boy did not know the reason either. He kept on enduring the pain, and then died.

Till the end, it seemed he was unable to understand why he wanted to live.

He was not gifted with a miraculous Apple, and he left behind only an unmoving corpse. "Mitaka", who watched his final moments, found him pitiable.

Not understanding his reason for living, and not knowing why he didn't want to die; just like that, he died in pain.

In that boy, "Mitaka" - saw his future self.

Anger and confusion rose within him.

And so, "Mitaka" ate the boy's corpse.

By consuming every bit of flesh, "Mitaka" transformed into Mitaka.

Taking the form of eaten humans was an ability carried throughout “Mitaka“‘s bloodline. Using that ability to repeatedly deceive humanity, each successive generation sought “Apple“‘s to the extent of their ability —

The clan of the Original Sin. The last snake was “Mitaka”.

Was it for the final wishes of his ancestors who desired immortality? Was it to prevail over the words of that girl who denied him completely? Was it for the boy who pitifully died without understanding why he lived? Even “Mitaka” himself wasn’t sure.

“I will find the meaning of living for me as well as for you.”

“Mitaka” murmured to himself, and his transformation was complete. He also gained Takamikado Mitaka’s thoughts and memories.

His goal to find immortality did not change. Though he would encounter countless amounts of cruelty, this was “Mitaka“‘s instinct, his dearest wish. There was no way it could change.

But why did he want eternity? Why did he wish to push death aside?

The answer to this - became “Mitaka“‘s objective.

And now.

Before achieving that goal, “Mitaka” couldn’t even deal with unexpected situations.

That was because two incomprehensible beings had appeared at the same time.

One was was the object of this body’s - Takamikado Mitaka’s - twisted yet deep love, Kuroki Tatsue.

It seemed the body would react out of its own will to her slightest frustration, cry, or injury, making him suffer too. And there was her ability to manipulate wind. Even “Mitaka” did not understand the basis of that ability.

As for the other one, how should he put it, it was a girl who seemed

to transcend this mortal world -

“It hurts.” She lifted her right arm and made a pose.

“It hurts a lot.”

Then she raised her left hand, and with full-faced smile shouted enigmatically, “Fly away -”

The girl with the eared hat, a curled tail, and brown hair tied into pigtails remained unmoving in that pose. She wore Kannonsakazaki High School’s slightly mundane uniform, and she gave off an air that seemed to clash with her childish voice and movements.

She clapped together her hands that wore giant gloves, and looked over, “Mm, the pain flew away …Wait? Huh?”

Then she stared at “Mitaka” and Tatsue, and blushed for no apparent reason.

“Aaahh, a boy and a girl behind the school, this I LOVE YOU scenario — I-I, interrupted it. I’m leaving.”

Like a panicking caged bird, the girl ran into the wall and then the tree, trying to escape while saying strange things.

But after walking a bit she suddenly stopped and ran over the backpack that was probably hers, which had fallen down with to her.

The girl picked it up and seemed to be at a loss. “Aah, I forgot. Sis, sis are you okay? Are you hurt?

She said so as she nonchalantly took out a head.

From the bag.

She took out a head.

“Wh-”

“Mitaka” gasped, and Tatsue turned pale.

It was the head of a young woman beautiful white hair tied into braids. Wearing her gloves, the girl delicately stroked the head, and her eyebrows dropped as tears started to appear in her eyes. “Are you alright, sis? Do you need me to make the pain fly away?”

“This —” Suddenly, and unbelievably, the head opened its eyes and looked over. They were cold eyes showing neither emotion nor mercy.

The head muttered, “Whatever, my situation isn’t important.”

She monotonically said those words ominously.

“Over there, there’s a guy who’s similar to a monster, and - though it’s incomplete, there’s someone with Tear Song‘s powers.”

The female head looked at “Mitaka” and Tatsue, and hatred twisted her expression. “A dirty monster and the traitor Tear Song, today’s meeting is the first in a hundred years — no, it’s been longer then that, right?”

Then she raised her eyes to the girl holding her, and calmly ordered, “Mitsuki, God’s conviction, God’s angel. Use your merciless excretory organ — your Unpleasant Counter-current ‘role’, and cleanse these two.”

“Eh?” The girl that was commanded turned with confusion.

And with a frightful, emotionless voice completely different from her earlier innocence, “Since sis said so, I will obey.”

The girl named Saibara Mitsuki instantly disappeared.

At least, that was what Tatsue saw.

Only flying dust and Mitsuki’s afterimage remained.

“Bam, bam bam bam.”

The sudden fierce noise made Tatsue look upward, and her eyes widened. How was that possible? She didn’t understand.

Mitsuki was running up the vertical school wall, which was covered with vulgar words and graffiti with unclear meanings. She ran at an incredible speed as if she were on the ground.

“Wh - what.”

Tatsue was frozen in fear. She merely watched that superhuman action without knowing its intention.

The windows scattered all over the wall were broken under Mitsuki's mad sprint. It was no illusion - then, in this situation, what was going on with movement like this?

"Haa -" With a battle cry, Mitsuki neared the roof with a single step and then turned to unhesitatingly jump down.

"No way!"

Facing Mitsuki's string of strange actions, Tatsue was completely unable to respond. Tatsue was great at studying, and she had no shortage of artistic talent, and she was decent even in athletics.

But she had never received any training for when an overwhelming opponent took such strange actions.

Saibara Mitsuki spread her arms, and fell with a smile on her face. "You'll be crushed flat as a pancake."

Jumping from that height that defied reason? But she couldn't be deceived by that action that seemed like a child's frolicking. Though she didn't know how much Mitsuki weighed, upon thinking about several dozen kilograms of flesh falling from the fourth floor, Tatsue's quick mind could understand the amount of force involved.

"What —" She'd be flattened.

"What kind of joke is this —" She would be flattened, just as Mitsuki said. Tatsue imagined her and Mitsuki's bodies mixed together in pieces on the ground, and turned white.

Yet her legs were already paralyzed, unable to move.

In this absurd situation, she was infuriatingly unable to move her body properly.

"Tatsue, stop spacing out!"

Suddenly, she was knocked from the side. Tatsue realized that Mitaka had forcefully rammed her, and the two rolled on the moss-covered ground.

It hurt, and -

"Please don't just touch me as you with." Tatsue turned faintly red, and scolded Mitaka who was currently right in front of her face.

Her mind fell into chaos.

“Wow, you dodged it?” As Tatsue was busy being shy, a flesh comet with the appearance of a girl plummeted down.

— “Splat.”

An unrealistic, manga-like sound. The ground shook, and a dark red liquid flew everywhere. Tatsue screamed.

Though she was unharmed thanks to Mitaka’s help, the scene of the girl who fell from the roof and hitting the ground seemed to have been mentally scarring.

“Ahaha, I lost.”

Saibara Mitsuki, who had become a devastated mess thanks to that fall, laughed open-heartedly.

“Hee.” She got up as if nothing happened. Her flesh was absolutely squashed, she bled profusely, a number of her bones stuck out of her skin and her face was also deformed.

“Since I took away my sense of pain, I can still fight, Ah, what’s up with you two?”

With that face that was unbearable to look at, Mitsuki smiled. “Why so afraid?”

Then, she dragged her broken leg and walked over. That appearance was a bit dull compared to what one could see in horror movies developed with recent technology, but the feeling of reality was something movies could never replicate.

“Ah… ee — Aaaaahhhh!” Tatsue collapsed on the spot from fear.

Upon seeing Tatsue like that, Mitaka immediately stood up and proffered his hand, “Tatsue, let’s go!”

“Eh — what?”

Tatsue could not respond quickly; her education was insufficient for an abnormal situation like this. In the human life she had been living, she stayed distant from these strange affairs as she should have —

Mitaka grabbed Tatsue's hand, and spoke seriously. "Falling from such a height yet still still surviving, how could that girl possibly be a normal human? My body's only that of a human, and it doesn't seem like you know how to fight… Damn it! Just hurry up and go -"

"That's right." A tranquil, female voice suddenly chimed in.

"Ki-chan, you are truly unsuitable for battle."

Tatsue looked over and saw the head, which had rolled out from the bag that should have fallen with Mitsuki, poke its face out. But, probably due to Mitsuki's protection, it was unharmed. "Don't I always say this? You must think everything through, like a cat on the hunt, for the smallest actions can produce the maximum results."

"I'm not a cat."

Like a mouse who had only ever been hunted and now that she was the hunter, Mitsuki tilted her head with perplexion, and walked over. "Sis, this time I'll beat them up directly."

"Tatsue, get up! She's coming!"

Though Mitaka was shouting at her, her limp body couldn't easily be put back into action. Tatsue tried to push herself from the ground using her arms, but she slipped on the moss and fell.

"Uuh —"

Looking at the slowly approaching Mitsuki, Mitaka began spewing foul words. "What the hell is this, Takamikado Mitaka. You're a worthless coward, a weakling with no sense of courage."

He spread his arms, and stood as if protecting Tatsue. "Why? Why can't I abandon this person and escape by myself…"

Tatsue watched Mitaka, who shook as he protected her, and words slipped out. "Mitaka-chan."

She had once addressed her beloved childhood friend this way.

Though he had started falling in depravity later, leading her to lose hope -

That was how it should have been.

Why is he protecting me now? He's clearly frightened, but he's willing to stand up and save me.

"Bang -" That would normally be a sound made by some innocent child. Mitsuki's pose with clenched fists lacked any sense of coherence. She just swung downwards with her hands spread wide open. If a professional martial artist — like, say, a karate master — saq this, he wouldn't be able to stand looking at the mistake-riddled movements.

However, her fist's destructive power belied its clumsy appearance.

Mitsuki swung her gloved hand and struck Mitaka directly. He flew like a playground ball and hit the school wall, and then fell down.

"Mitaka!" Tatsue screamed, and, unsteady both in her movements, crawled up. She thought that just standing up was so difficult… while adjusting her pose.

Mitsuki looked into backpack she carried, still without showing the slightest malice.

"How was that, sis? Did I — punch well?"

"Why are you so foolish? You're still in the middle of a battle… Don't go easy, mercilessly beat down your enemies until they can no longer draw breath!"

It seems like the head in the backpack is giving Mitsuki advice. I don't know whose head it is, but maybe I can gain an advantage if I separate it from her.

"Actually -" From behind Tatsue, whose entire body was shaking as she gripped her fan, the woman's head looked at Mitaka. She said, "It seems we have gained something unexpected from this. Ki-chan - That monster is Snake. Look carefully!"

"Snake?"

Mitsuki stared at Mitaka with her bloody face, and Tatsue also turned to look. Mitaka trembled with his knees on the ground,

trying to stand up.

His uniform was blown apart at his stomach where Mitsuki punched him, revealing his black skin. To hide the skin that resembled reptilian scales, human skin suddenly covered the black skin.

“What?” Tatsue looked on with a deathly pale face.

She couldn’t understand. What was going on?

Though she may have simply seen wrong, it seemed too implausible that she only missaw this one part of her ridiculous situation. Was there skin like black scales under Mitaka’s human skin?

“The ones who scattered the Seven Great Fragments, who cast all humanity into damnation, the ultimate sinners on the earth - Snake.”

The head smiled in delight, and said to Mitsuki who did not understand, “Kill him! Ki-chan, torture him to death! It was because of his ancestors that our bodies have become like this!”

Mitsuki looked at her own bloodied body. “Ah —”

She looked at the monster-like body that would not die no matter how badly it was injured, “His crime is really serious…”

And then, she continued to watch Mitaka with those empty yet bright eyes.

He’d be killed. Tatsue could feel Mitaka’s impending death.

How scary. This girl with overwhelming attack power and an immortal body was terribly scary. It was indeed enough to make one think of fleeing.

But, sooner or later she needed to surpass her brother and become the most powerful person in the world. How could she possibly do that if she ran away here, unable to save even one person?

Besides, Mitaka was injured from protecting her.

“S-slow down!” Tatsue pointed her fan at Mitsuki, and gave a resounding order.

“If you want to kill Mitaka, you’ll have to cross over my dead body first!”

“Tatsue!” Mitaka stood up with a pained expression, and shouted at Tatsue’s back.

“Stop that, hurry up and go! Don’t you know that you’ll only get killed?’

“You’re too loud for a subordinate.”

Tatsue imagined the wind. Flying throughout the world, the wind was a symbol of freedom.

She had longed for the wind, in awe at its unrestrained might.

So please, at least for now, wind - lend me your power.

With her shivering fingers, she entwined the wind and blew at Mitsuki.

The breath of a dragon.

Tatsue still didn’t understand the magnitude or source of this power, but it probably wasn’t lethal. With good luck, though, she should at least be able to blow Mitsuki away. She would blow her far away, and the escape to a safe place with Mitaka.

“Aha.” Mitsuki innocently smiled.

“You can’t hit me with an attack this weak.”

She spread her arms, looking at the tornado that flew over while picking up dust and leaves. “Even divine punishment would be deflected, and nuclear weapons can’t harm me. If God Himself wishes me harm, I would dare to even kill Him. Unrivaled in this world, that’s me, the unparalleled Unpleasant Counter-current!”

Mitsuki fluidly stretched her hand forward.

Her palm covered by her glove was hit by a blast of wind -

“Get you!”

And she grabbed it.

What??

She grabbed the wind, and rolled it together like she was kneading dough. She took the destructive power of the invisible wind - and

rolled it into a ball.

“Begin!” Then, unbelievably, a hole opened on Mitsuki’s belly.

Fierce, sharp teeth bit through her uniform, and showed her true form. Dripping with saliva, the teeth clattered. Mitsuki put the dragon’s breath that she had rolled into a ball between the teeth.

“Chomp chomp chomp.”

It ate the wind.

“What the…”

Tatsue was shocked into silence, only able to describe the action as “eating”. The second, large mouth on Mitsuki’s stomach that had bitten through her uniform forcefully wolfed down Tatsue’s power.

“Ahaha.”

Mitsuki seemed dazed as she put her hands on her cheeks and wiggled.

“Mm, mm, mm - There just isn’t enough malice, but it’s pure, and so tasty.”

The change took only an instant.

The severe injuries that Mitsuki’s body had sustained from dropping from the roof gradually disappeared, like time was rewinding. Wounds closed, bones re-entered her flesh, and the scattered blood rushed back into her body.

After a few seconds, Mitsuki’s body had been completely restored.

“Bang — Mitsuki’s - Great - Revival.”

Unbelievable.

Tatsue stood idly, her face pale, and lost her will to keep attacking. Victory was not possible against such a ridiculous opponent - this monstrous enemy with an unknown identity.

As Tatsue trembled in fear, Mitsuki smiled brilliantly. “It’s not over.”

She muttered to herself, and pried open the mouth on her stomach. “Karmic retribution, the angel of judgement; that’s Unpleasant Counter-current’s ‘role’.”

Mitsuki spoke with a smile, her voice truly seeming as innocent as an angel’s.

“Pretty much any religion includes ‘judgement on sinners,’ - Karmic retribution, or punishment of humans based on the severity of their crimes. You guys watch closely. This is the power of Unpleasant Counter-Current, which annihilated the Cities of Sin, Sodom and Gomorrah, by causing their sins and evil to flow back into them!”

And instantly, a bullet filled with destructive power shot out from Mitsuki’s stomach.

This attack was very similar to the impact of the wind Tatsue created, and its sole purpose was to strike down enemies.

Apparently to protect her, Mitaka rushed over, but he was too late. Tatsue’s entire body tensed in preparation for dodging the bullet, but because everything happened too quickly she was unable to move.

Easily reflecting all of Tatsue’s power, Unpleasant Counter-Current’s attack -

“Bang.”

“Huh?”

- brushed past Tatsue, merely lifting her long black hair.

That was all.

Mitsuki made an inane sound. Tatsue, shaking in fear, felt around herself, but she was completely unharmed — she couldn’t even feel any pain.

Tatsue found it strange, and looked at Mitsuki. Mitsuki was hugging herself and seemed to be contemplating.

And then, Mitsuki looked to her backpack - with a deep sigh, she mumbled, “Seems like it really won’t work.”

Her expression softened, and she approached Tatsue. Though Tatsue took a few steps back, she was too slow and couldn’t help but allow

her to get near.

Tatsue had no experience whatsoever with being beat up or trampled, and her fear rose. But —

The hand with which Mitsuki reached out was a request for a handshake.

“It’s not working?”

Seemingly bothered by something, Mitsuki gripped Tatsue’s hand. She could feel the glove’s softness. Tatsue looked at Mitsuki with confusion, and Mitsuki said, “I can only fight against evil.”

“Wait, what?”

Tatsue asked, and Mitsuki replied with puffed cheeks. “Basically, I’m Unpleasant Counter-Current - If my enemy doesn’t think ‘I want to kill this person’, or ‘HATE HATE HATE’, or “I hate her so much’, or ‘So disgusting, it’s way too disgusting’, or other things along those lines, I can’t fight. That’s my ‘role’.”

Mitsuki unhappily turned around.

And then with a shake of her pigtails, she stared at Tatsue over her shoulder. “Why’d you two only care about protecting each other. Attacks that only have physical force, that only have pure feelings, it’s useless for me to regurgitate them. There’s nothing I can do, so I won’t fight anymore.”

“Wait - Ki-chan?” From her backpack came the head’s voice.

“What are saying all on your own? If you can’t beat them with Unpleasant Counter-Current, you can just eliminate them with your bare hands. With your physical strength it would be easy to take them out in a physical fight. “

“I don’t want to do that.” Mitsuki murmured, in absolute rejection. “These two don’t seem to be Gankyū or The Weakest; and besides, I just want to be Unpleasant Counter-Current, not Sterilization Disinfection like sis. I can’t and don’t want to kill people who aren’t evil.”

And with that pledge, the absurd girl who called herself Unpleasant Counter-Current smiled. “Then, excuse me.”

“Wait - Ki-chan! Stop!”

It seemed that voice was still angrily shouting something, but Mitsuki ran away without listening to it. Mitaka fell into silence, and Tatsue also did not speak.

Once they could no longer see Mitsuki’s back - a bell finally signaled the end of lunch.

“There’s a spirit of death living in an abandoned factory on the outskirts of town.”

“Rei-chan, what’s that idiot Miku talking about now?

“Heehee.

“Three years ago, didn’t a factory close down due to recession or something? I don’t know which factory it was, but it’s said that a spirit of death started living there at one point.”

“Oh, that’s cool.”

“Miku’s always bursting with pointless rumors, I like it!”

“Your boobs should just shrink and you can just die!”

“You i-idiot. Stop dragging me.”

“Plus, that spirit of death actually fights for justice. Every night it goes to exterminate the monsters wreaking havoc in town.”

“The monsters you’re talking about… eh? The one in the rumors lately - what was it called again?”

“Ah, I think I saw it in the newspaper.”

“Right, I heard about it too. It seems a lot of people have been seeing weird beings recently. What a pain, Long-Armed Demon is finally gone, but monsters are coming to slaughter people in its place. Man, this world is so weird!”

“Don’t just ignore me. Don’t ignore Miku and chat happily!”

“Rei-chan, the idiot got lonely and she’s saying disgusting things.”

“Why do you have to consult me whenever Miku does something?”

“Hehe.”

This silver monster was a humanoid blade. Its basic shape was the same as a human’s, but no one would have confused its body made of blades, which cut with every touch, for a human.

“Clank, tssss.”

The monster walked in the abandoned factory while making a sound like rubbing metal.

What was this factory? Was it a building that had, after being shut down for some reason, become corpse-like and uncared-for? The monster was not sure, and it did not care either.

“Clank, tssss.”

It may have felt excited, as thick saliva dripped from its outstretched red tongue.

There was a skillfully concealed open hole in the factory’s wall. That person used it as an entrance and lived here.

The monster wanted to kill that person very much.

“Tssss, clank.”

There were unmoving conveyor belts, mountains of cardboard boxes, fine machinery with unknown purpose and a workstation that was slightly dirty. Sand and dust accumulated on the ground like snow, and small footprints imprinted on top led further in.

The monster looked deeper into the building and gave an ominous smile.

There were no eyes on its face, only a mouth cluttered with uneven sharp teeth. Its tongue hung outside its mouth, sliding across its face. It walked forward while keeping its body low.

It silenced its footsteps, and held its breath.

“Ggii, huhu.”

Yet, it still made excited breathing sounds, and its voice sounded different because of its joy.

There was a wall of cardboard boxes in front of it, and though it couldn't see clearly from its current position, there was something shining deeper in.

A lamp? Or a flashlight? The dim light couldn't sufficiently light up the gloomy factory, but - it could sense that that person was here.

"Nn -" The monster walked over, and heard a voice. It was like a young boy's, but listening carefully, it could tell that the speaker was actually female. In a guilt-free voice, "Ah, man. This thing's so - what's the word, novel? Konnyaku jelly? Is it konnyaku or jelly? Mmm, what a novelty… I need to try eating every once in a while."

She seemed to be eating, what with the clanking of cups and plates and that contemplating voice.

The monster noiselessly approached the voice that kept going “What a novelty”, and, standing in front of the wall of cardboard boxes, it raised its blade arms -

It grinned in joy.

“Who is it?” The girl suddenly shouted, noticing its movements. But it was too late.

“Ooohhhh!”

With a giant roar, the monster spun its body and tore down the cardboard wall. It raised its blade arms and swung as it stepped forward, one foot after another. It spun forward, cutting through the cardboard boxes. Right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg.

“Right arm, left arm, right leg, left leg, right arm, left arm, right leg -” Suddenly, from above the monster’s head, where pieces of cardboard it had chopped were sent flying, came a voice. “Slicing while spinning — just like a top.”

After hearing that, the monster shook with surprise - and it slowed down.

“In other words, if your head is stopped, the rest of your body will follow suit and stop.”

With a thump to its head, it was forced to a standstill.

“Once you stop… it’s easy to strike you down.”

As that voice came from its back, the monster was knocked into the cardboard pieces it had cut up. It stopped with a violent thud on the wall - and turned to look at the enemy who had struck him from behind.

Still in her kicking position, a girl coldly looked over. “What — it was a monster.”

She had emotionless eyes like the barrel of a gun, and bizarre, wolf-like hair. She wore jeans and a jacket that for some reason had the words “Rock’n Roll” printed on it.

“Then, let’s go.” The enemy who had struck the monster - Gankyū Eguriko, thus declared.

As Guriko faced the silver monster, she thought of the days after she separated with Rinne and Sakaki.

Her ancient, thousand-year-old body had long lost a sense of time. The days passed through Guriko’s flesh at a startling speed.

Half a year, it had been half a year.

Rinne had been turned into a Meat Doll by Sterilization Disinfection, and Guriko had spent that much time wandering the

world, searching in vain for a way to turn her back. Despair started to fill her thoughts, almost driving her mad at times.

But her imperiled sanity was supported by -

The days, though incomparably short compared to her own life, that she spent in happiness with Rinne and Sakaki.

I just want to re-live our time together. As long as I succeed, I don't care what I need to do.

Guriko thus pledged to herself; though weakness was growing within her heart, she continued to press on.

"I thought I could find something just by coming here."

"And then? Did you find what you were looking for, Yono?"

Far away from Kannonsakazaki, it was the road she had long ago walked with the companions who had given her their Apples and then disappeared - Kudan and Kirigirisu. Guriko thought that if she traced her journey with those two, who had known so much more than herself, something would come out of it. But she didn't find anything noteworthy. In the end, she came to the place where she died, where a gloomy man awaited her.

"Zekiguchi Nashinori."

"Hehe. I am honored that you remember."

His black hair was tied intricately, and, standing exceptionally tall, he had eyes resembling a wolf's.

He was a man with both a priest's air elegance and a beast's fierce temper.

A thousand years ago - back when Guriko was still called Yono, this man had killed her.

"Zekiguchi… what's going on?" Guriko took out her spoons, and looked at him, her voice shaking.

"Why is there nothing here?"

Guriko shouted. The entire area had nothing. It was a flat wasteland that was difficult to describe. Without even a weed, the barren plain stretched to the horizon.

A millennium ago, Guriko and her adoptive parents lived here with their tribe.

The natural stone home that she would surely have been shut in during the plague.

Even the waterfall from which she had fallen to her death was no longer there.

She had considered that the landscape changed over a thousand years. But even so, no matter how she thought about it, it was impossible for her home from a thousand years ago to disappear without a trace.

“Hehe.” Zekuguchi gave an unsuitably innocent laugh, and calmly spoke to the rattled Guriko.

“This time, you’ve gained suspicion.” For some reason, those unclear words rang in her heart.

“Does my hometown really exist? Was I really picked up by those parents, living in that impoverished tribe? Did I really die falling from that waterfall? Are my memories accurate?”

Facing the cheerfully sneering Zekuguchi, Guriko shouted, “What do you know!”

She rapidly threw her spoon.

“Talk! What do you know about me? If you lie I’ll gouge out your eyeballs!” Guriko pointed at the spoon sticking out by Zekiguchi’s feet, and glared at him seriously.

“That was my last warning. Now talk!”

“Eyeballs?” Zekiguchi, for the first time, withdrew his smile and put on an incredulous expression.

“I never taught you that, where’d you learn that. Oh well, do as you wish, gouge them out if you so desire.”

As he spoke, on his cheeks, his forehead, his chin - even outside his face, on his neck, his shoulders, and palms, countless eyeballs

appeared.

“Wh-what…”

All of his eyes simultaneously looked at Guriko, and Zekiguchi smiled leisurely. “My ability is to transform and modify my body. Well - that isn’t important.”

Zekiguchi looked at Guriko with a sincere expression, and said with a low voice, “If you want to know the truth, then go back to Kannonsakazaki.”

Kannonsakazaki, where Sakaki and Rinne lived. The town where Guriko’s hope and despair coalesced - the truth was there?

“What’s going on?”

Guriko asked, but Zekiguchi smiled with answering.

In the end, he merely looked at Guriko with kind eyes. “Investigating the past is useless. In this world, only the present exists.”

He said those baffling words softly, and then disappeared like an evening cloud.

After Guriko thought it over, suspecting a trap, but in the end she followed Zekiguchi’s words.

And after a few weeks, she returned to the town.

“Again -” She quickly noticed the town’s unusual atmosphere.

There were too many monsters.

“Monsters.”

Monsters - they normally hid in another dimension, popping in from time to time to eat humans. They were beings only at that level. Their breed was a mess of oddities, and there were many mysteries about them. For example, they did not leave corpses after they died, disappearing into the air instead, and there were many other unclear things.

Because of Guriko's resolution, she would not return to Rinne's place before finding a cure for her. As a result, for the time being, she decided to hide and secretly eliminate monsters that threatened Rinne's safety.

She didn't know why this abnormality with monsters was occurring.

But, she felt, unless she found and eradicated its source, she could not set out on another journey with peace of mind.

"Clack, clack, tsss."

The silver monster made a shuddering noise as it stood there; she couldn't tell if it was laughter or scraping metal. Its entire body was inorganic, save for the red tongue hanging outside that seemed particularly disgusting. Guriko frowned, and took out a spoon to throw at it.

"Clank."

The monster didn't even budge as the stainless steel spoon bounced off of its solid body and fell to the ground.

"Speaking of which, this guy doesn't have eyeballs. How troublesome."

Guriko mumbled to herself, watching the smiling monster that was stationary save for its tongue. Guriko was only armed with spoons. Actually, she had a last resort, but that would squander her Apple's power, so she couldn't overuse it. Plus, a few months back she had lost an arm to the enemy known as Sterilization Disinfection, and though her immortality provided her with regenerative ability, it did not seem able to restore that arm which had been completely dissolved.

Then, how should she proceed?

"The most vile crime that can be committed - what do you think it is?"

Suddenly, a voice came from somewhere. It clearly sounded like an old person's raspy voice, yet somehow it resounded within her mind.

Who was talking?

It wasn't the monster in front of her. As she thought that the voice seemed to come from the abandoned factory's ceiling, it suddenly came again, this time from behind her.

"Murder? That's definitely heinous. Corruption? Newspapers target that all the time. Imprisonment? Suddenly taking away a person's freedom, that's excessive without a doubt. Deceit? Even elementary schoolers know not to lie."

The voice seemed like it was playing with Guriko who had raised her guard, as it unhurriedly continued.

"Then. After make a list of crimes like this, it can be seen that a single factor links them all together. That is, to take something from others without heed to rules or principles - that is crime. The act of breaking the law for self gain is known as crime, and one will be punished as a result."

"Who are you?" Guriko shouted, aiming spoons in every direction for the purpose of scaring the speaker. But, it seemed - the only ones in the factory were herself and the monster in front of her. Could it have been something like a pre-prepared recording? Or was this monster in front of her speaking with some mysterious method?

"Taking money, taking lives, taking hearts, taking trust. Stealing, nothing but stealing. What are crimes like that called? What is the ultimate crime that covers every type of crime? Hmm, you should know — 'Berobōchō'?"

The monster that was called Berobōchō spat out its red tongue, and while laughing it replied to the voice: "Robbery!"

Demonstrating a hominid-like behavior, Berobōchō noisily rubbed its hands together and sliced cardboard boxes apart for no particular reason.

"That's right. It's robbery. You over there. This monster's original name was Shigure Benimaru, and he committed the ultimate crime, robbery, for a living. He took lives, he took money, he took jewels, and he took dignity. The evil The Weakest liked that about him, and changed him into this."

With a tone like that of a superb movie, the voice spoke to the surprised Guriko.

“Ahh, no response. Is this person like your brothers?

These unintelligible words made Guriko’s expression change.

“What are you talking about. Who are you! Just how much do you know about me?”

“Me? I am Tear Song. I do savior-esque things.”

It gave its name as if making a joking, but each word came from a different place, and like before it was impossible to locate.

“Ahh. You do not need to be so worried about me. I am a timid coward who cries a lot, and that is why I am called Tear Song.”

In that string of unexplained terms, Guriko recognized a few words. That is - a few months back, Sterilization Disinfection had said those words. God Mushi Emperor, Unpleasant Counter-current, Single Room, The Weakest, Catastrophe, Tear Song.

“Are you the same as Sterilization Disinfection?” Guriko thought of that fearsome woman, and held onto her shoulder to which no arm was attached.

Tear Song unhappily raised her voice. “I’m terribly sorry. The Seven Great Fragments are all separate individuals. It would bother me if you considered us all companions. But, you seem like you do not know anything, so I cannot blame you for misunderstanding.”

The voice gathered at one point, and gently said, “Mmm, is there anything you wish to know?”

Guriko’s expression disappeared from her face.

There are things I want to know that I would trade for with my life. I want to know how to cure Rinne, who turned into a Meat Doll because of me -

Possibly realizing something from Guriko’s face, Tear Song cheerfully spoke.

“There’s something you want to know, correct? You should be fine with me telling you, right? I, the savior Tear Song, will show the divine way to the lost lambs. Guiding toward the proper path - that is my ‘role’… and this.”

After thinking for a short while, the voice muttered, like a demon,

“One Fragment, or five Fragments.”

Just as Guriko scrunched her eyebrows, Tear Song coldly stated her request.

“So, what I was saying was - I will tell you what you wish to know. So you must pay an appropriate price… this will take five of the small Fragments you call ‘Apples’. Or, one of the Great Fragments that act as God’s personas.”

The savior demanding for equivalent exchange calmly said, “Sterilization Disinfection’s goal seems to be collecting all of the pieces, and restore ‘God’s existence. This goal is quite different from mine or The Weakest‘s. After all, no matter how many fragments you collect it will not be enough. Why? I am the omniscient Tear Song. So as long as you pay with Fragments, I can answer virtually any question you have.”

Faced with this offer, Guriko thought for a while. Tear Song might have been the same kind of being as Sterilization Disinfection, and getting favors from such a being made her feel uncomfortable; she even felt a sense of danger. But Guriko had made an oath, that even if she had to sell her soul to the Devil - she would let Rinne recover.

“Fine.” Determination shone in Guriko’s eyes as she lifted her head and faced the emptiness. “I don’t know what your goal is, but as long as you get the information I want I’m fine with it. Five Apples, or a Great Fragment, correct? I currently do not have that, so I will go collect them.”

“Mmm. I have heard that you fought with Sterilization Disinfection. Her heart that you took, that was a Great Fragment!”

Hearing Tear Song‘s surprised voice, Guriko coldly sneered.

“That’s your goal? Too bad, I don’t know about that. I tossed that thing back when I killed her.”

“Oh –” The intriguing echo reverberated throughout the abandoned factory.

“That’s fine. It’s fine as long as I receive the Fragments. I await your struggles… Berobōchō, let’s get back.”

“Gyah!”

With a roar, Berobōchō charged at Guriko like a wild animal. Though Guriko responded quickly, some of her hair was sliced off.

“Ugh, what are you doing!”

Guriko pulled out her spoons and prepared to fight, yet Tear Song’s admonishment stayed her actions.

“Hey! Berobōchō, do not move without permission!”

“Clank, tssss, Katsssss.”

Berobōchō made a metallic rubbing noise as it wriggled its tongue, laughing as it jumped around in provocation. And then, it turned and turned in an all-destroying tornado, bringing ruin to the factory’s equipment.

“Aagh, this person’s unstable right now. Losing Long-Armed Demon was indeed a big loss. She was easy to order around… That vile The Weakest, dumping on me such a troublesome subordinate!”

“!”

A surge of power burst out. Berobōchō shrieked “Wuah?” like a whipped dog and ran out of the factory as if fearing something. Apparently Tear Song did something – but what exactly was done was unclear. Guriko didn’t see anything, but her hair was blown by wind.

Tear Song seemed to have calmed down for the time being, and continued speaking with the same tone as before. “Then – Gankyū Eguriko, I await your good news. I am the all-knowing sensory organ – if you need anything you may call for me directly.”

Upon finishing that statement, this person left behind a wondrous echoes and disappeared.

Guriko subconsciously gazed over the wrecked factory for a while, and then sighed and stared at the spoon she tightly held. “Steal Fragments from other people – and then find out the means of curing Rinne through a deal with Tear Song.”

She muttered to herself, and feebly lowered her eyes.

“This isn’t wrong, is it? I didn’t make another mistake, did I? Rinne, Sakaki – mom, dad.”

She thought of those important people who were not by her side, and whom she may never see again.

Tear out the heart, or take it after dealing a severe wound – those are some of the few methods to take Apples. Yet Guriko could not imagine herself doing such things to humans she did not know.

But…

“I’ve already decided to become a monster.”

Alone, Guriko quietly murmured.

Night 2: Granulated Sugar and a One-sided Love

A turbulent, whirling, malignant current.

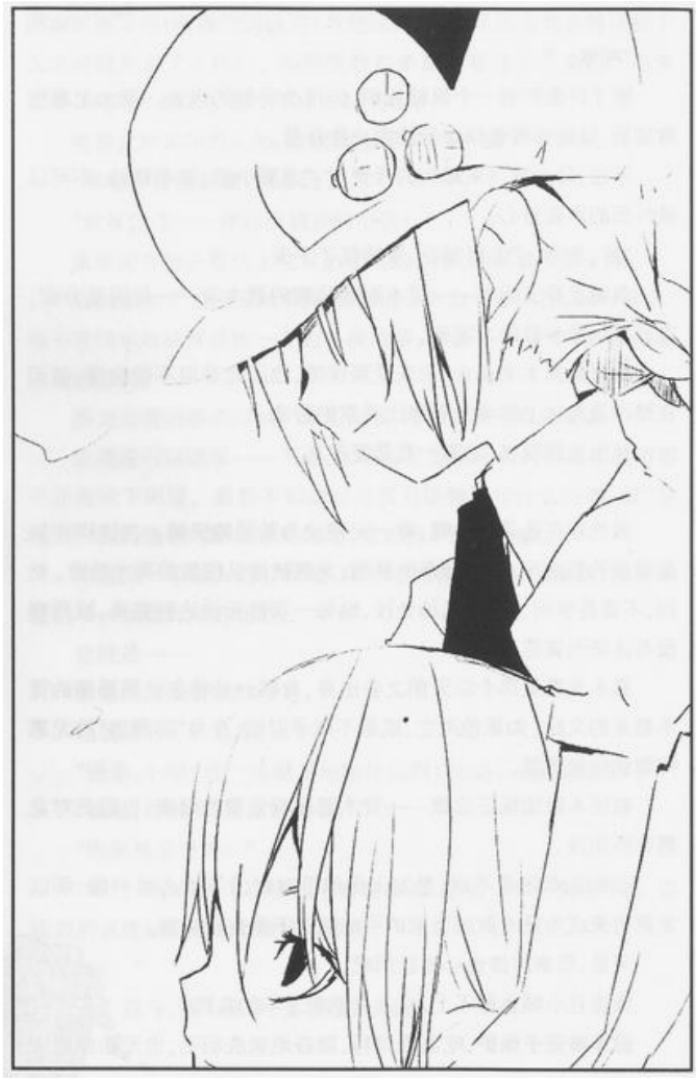
A writhing, wavering, unpleasant torrent.

“But I don’t understand.”

Saibara Mitsuki – Unpleasant Counter-current – stood on one foot on top of a high telecommunication tower with a perplexed look on her face. She was on a tower deep into the mountains, a small distance away from Kannonsakazaki. This area contained numerous telecommunication towers and was completely covered by a dark stretch of forest. The only building in the vicinity was a giant mansion, likely owned by some rich person.

Although she was assailed by the strong mountain wind and almost fell down many times. Mitsuki managed to stay where she was with an astounding balance and kept muttering to herself.

No. Not to herself.



“Well,” with no need to hide its existence, the head was taken out of the secured bag and looked down upon the world with Mitsuki, “it’s not only Kannonsakazaki that had an increase in the number of monsters. Monsters are popping up frequently and simultaneously all over the world.”

“Why?” Mitsuki held down her hat with the round ears and asked. “This has never happened before. Why would monsters suddenly multiply?”

“I don’t know – God Mushi Emperor won’t tell me everything. However, I must be the reason why monster have multiplied.”

Upon hearing this, Mitsuki opened her eyes wide in shock: “So Sis is the culprit – but I trusted you so much –” She then tossed the head upward from her already terrifyingly elevated position on top of the telecommunication tower.

“Woahhhhhhhh?!!!!!!” Spinning, the head screamed as it flew up into the sky. “Hey, you are really stupid! Let me finish! I was going to say I lost my Greater Fragment before finding a suitable successor! Now Sterilization Disinfection, this ‘role’ that represses monsters, disappeared – Kyaaaa!! This is so high! I’m spinning so quickly! This is so scaryyyyyyy!”

Looking at the screaming head, Mitsuki stuck out her tongue and poked herself on the head.

“Teehee~ Mitsuki didn’t understand and said the wrong thing.”

“You’re going to remember this – you witless kid!”

Mitsuki didn’t look up at the head screaming on top of her. She tried to sort out her thoughts.

The numbers of monsters increased because Sterilization Disinfection no longer existed. Sterilization Disinfection, who was tasked with distinguishing right from wrong and ruthlessly eliminating evil, had always annihilated the monsters that appeared in this world.

Did the monsters all appear because the ‘role’ of Sterilization Disinfection could no longer be fulfilled?

She could understand the reasoning – however, it was also possible somebody set down a trap in Sterilization Disinfection’s absence. Although she didn’t know what anyone would want to do with monsters, Mitsuki felt an uncanny premonition from her ‘role’ that specializes in detecting evil intentions.

Let’s figure out the enemy’s goal. The result of these multiplying monsters would be chaos in the world – and the death of humanity.

That would mean –

Mitsuki closed her eyes in thought.

That would mean – what would it mean?

“Hold on, Ki-chan! What are you thinking about! Did you forget about me?”

“Sis, you’re being very loud. I’m trying to think.”

“You did forget me!”

“Donk”

The falling head smacked onto Mitsuki’s head, causing her to lose her balance.

Wobbling, she tipped over the edge of the steel telecommunication tower, plummeting quickly towards the ground.

“Huh?”

In the air, she rolled once, twice…and smashed into the ground.

Thump

At a familiar yet uncommon sound, Kuroki Tatsue furrowed her brows slightly and looked out from the luxuriously decorated window.

However, a sharp sound of rebuke quickly flew her way: “Tatsue-san, focus. You can’t be distracted by sounds from the outside.”

“Yes, Sensei.” Tatsue lowered her head and her expression became sullen.

The Kuroki family – a subordinate branch family of the Sakaki family who controlled the world – was one of the wealthiest families in Japan.

Tatsue was the eldest daughter of the Kuroki family. Her future was all but secured. However, that was also why she could not afford to be lazy, and even had to endure unusual amounts of mental and physical anguish.

Tatsue had always been a caged bird ever since she was born.

Now you are just an ugly duckling, but one day you will become a

beautiful swan. With such a fairytale preposition from her mother, Tatsue was given a severe regimen in education and trainings to reach her full potential. However, be it academics, arts, or sports, she could not achieve perfection in any one category, and it hurt every time she was berated for her lack of talent.

Kuroki Tatsue was the step-sister of Sakaki Guryū, who was born as a swan and will one day soar to the top of the world. If he died, or refused to inherit the Organization, Tatsue would take his place in her role as 'insurance'.

Her mother – the lover of Sakaki Ganhō, who was the current CEO of the Sakaki Organization – also hoped for this outcome.

Fortunately or not, her elder brother Guryū didn't seem too interested in the Organization. There was still some real hope that Tatsue may become the head of the Sakaki Organization in the future.

But Mother should have known the truth all this time.

I'm not even an ugly duckling. I am only a raven without any talents whatsoever. Even if I live in a cage, given quality foods, industriously washing my feathers, I could never become as beautiful as I wish. No matter how much I am told to "Become whiter! Become white and beautiful!", I can never manage that as a raven.

Tears welled up in Tatsue's eyes.

She wanted to run away from her house many times.

I'm trying very hard too. I understand what everyone expects of me. But no matter how much I train myself, how much I strive for the goal, I remain far from my brother's perfection.

I believe there are fundamental differences between people's inborn talents.

I can't do this. I am a Kuroki. I cannot take a Sakaki's place.

"Seriously."

In the sound-proof music room, the female tutor crossed her legs and sighed at Tatsue, who was practicing her violin. She could have said this either intentionally or not, but –

“Her brother could play it better.”

This sentence pierced through the most fragile part of Tatsue’s soul.

Your brother is more outstanding. Your brother is better. Your brother is more talented. You need to look up to your brother, brother, brother, brother.

“I…”

With a “bam”, Tatsue threw the violin onto the ground and lowered her head gloomily: “I am not big brother’s substitute!”

“Tatsue-san!” Angered, the tutor stared at Tatsue through her thin glasses: “What are you doing?! Keep practicing!”

A despicable silence ensued.

Cold tears dripped down Tatsue’s cheeks as she stared back at the tutor: “If you like big brother that much, then go teach him instead. I – I’m not big brother’s substitute!”

This was her limit.

When Tatsue was younger, she had witnessed her mother’s complaints, hidden behind the older woman’s fawning attitude.

Tatsue is useless. That girl won’t make it. She said that. No one acknowledges me. No one looks at me.

I’ve known this for a long time, but I tried my best to pretend that I don’t.

“Tatsue-san!”

Outraged, Tatsue glared furiously at the tutor, who was stretching her hand towards her.

“I hate you!”

She yelled and invoked a tornado. The tutor was blown away and smashed into the wall.

Tatsue was somewhat satisfied, but she soon felt empty again. She opened the door of the music room and ran downstairs.

She had the ability to control wind, an ability that her older brother did not have.

This was the first time Tatsue was aware of being herself. She had always been regarded as 'Sakaki Guryū's substitute".

Tatsue has always been told to follow Sakaki Guryū's path as closely as possible over the years.

No one expected to see Tatsue's own future. No one loved Tatsue. No one looked at Tatsue.

She realized this –

– And she could endure it no more.

– Mom! The tutor praised my drawings!

– Oh, well done Tatsue. Keep going like this, and you'll become someone as outstanding as your brother.

– Mm, I'll do my best! So, Mom, um…

– What's wrong, Tatsue?

– Praise **me**.

After watching a horror movie, after being scolded by her tutor, after her pet bird died – she would visit that room every time she encountered something sad or painful. However, as time passed by and they grew older, she had stopped doing that.

It was a large long building next to the Kuroki mansion, not intruding upon the outward impression of the main house.

About forty servants of the Kuroki household resided there.

Tatsue carefully sneaked in through the rear kitchen entrance, undetected by anyone. She traversed the long corridor and saw the room she wanted.

The servants, still busy at their jobs, did not seem to have returned here yet. It was quiet everywhere. Dinner time was approaching, but Tatsue didn't want to go back to the main house. She decided not to have dinner tonight.

She stood in front of the door labelled "Takamikado Mitaka". Every servant was given a room in this building.

Mitaka was the son of servants, and he was still serving his apprenticeship, often sent to do trivial jobs. If she recalled correctly, this was his weekly off-day.

"Mitaka –"

Tatsue knocked the door politely. Though she was surprised at the lack of responses, she still opened the door slowly: "Are you there, Mitaka?"

As she was about to step into the room, she realized the floor was so messy there was not even a clean spot to put her foot down. Her room was always tidied immaculately. Having never seen such an untidy room, she was scared. She looked down and saw the floor covered with magazines, manga, figurines, and some unknown items that had nothing to do with Tatsue's world.

This room was not like this the last time she visited a few years ago.

"Wh-what…" Tatsue couldn't help but blush when she saw a manga with a nude female figure. Although she had known this for a long time, she did not expect Mitaka to have fallen to such levels.

"Tatsue?"

She suddenly heard Mitaka's voice. The room was not big, but she could not see Mitaka. Tatsue looked around her. There was a wardrobe, cupboards, a desktop computer and a bookshelf. A bed was in the corner of the room.

"Honestly, don't scare me." Mitaka crawled out from under the bed.

"Th-th-that's what I was going to say!" Feeling awkward, Tatsue glared at him.

"Just where did you come out from, Mitaka? It's not like you are an insect or a reptile!"

Somehow, Mitaka had a serious expression and became silent after hearing this. He soon shook his head and picked up some plastic ropes on his bed, tying stacks of manga and magazines together. He was indeed categorizing rubbish into different bags while tying the magazines into one big bundle, as if planning to throw them away.

“What do you want? I’m busy tidying up right now.”

“Tidying – Mitaka –”

Tatsue still did not have the courage to step into the chaotic room. She closed the door after her and stood where she was.

“Don’t you… like these things a lot?”

“It seems so.” As if talking about someone else, Mitaka did not stop his movements.

“But that person calling herself my mother yells at me everyday to clean up, to tidy my room, to stop reading these things. After all, I don’t have much interest in this, so I did what she asked.”

Mitaka was indeed different.

Mitaka’s mother – also one of Tatsue’s personal servants – complained that Mitaka was rebellious, rude, and disobedient.

Clumsily, Mitaka tied a knot with the plastic robe he used to bundle up the magazines, and threw the piles on the bed: “Anyways, whenever I start to tidy up, Mom would look really happy. She even cried out of happiness… I feel good when she is so happy.”

He had a smile on his face as he muttered this. He was stunning. Tatsue felt that her heart, frozen by the behavior of the tutor, gradually melted. Mitaka’s mother was not the only one who was happy to see his transformation.

Mitaka looked sideways with a puzzled expression at Tatsue, who was busy feeling moved.

“What are you doing here anyways? Traces of tears are on your face. Did someone hurt you? Honestly, I don’t know what happened to you, but humans really do love crying!”

“Huh – I, I didn’t.”

Tatsue was very happy that he worried about her. Tears swelled in

her eyes, but her proud heart made her lift her chin arrogantly – at the end, she turned her face away.

However, she soon couldn't bear to watch Mitaka's clumsiness. Acting on a whim, she crossed the floor littered with manga and dirty clothes and approached his bed.

She sat down on his soft bed and went to help Mitaka. Tatsue was in a demure dress and had limited mobility, but that couldn't be helped.

"You're helping me? Tatsue is such a good kid."

Mitaka said this with total seriousness. Tatsue tilted her head as she picked up the magazines on the bed: "Good kid… that's a strange compliment."

"Oh? You told me before that you like being complimented in that way, didn't you?" Tatsue was surprised that he said this in such a casual manner.

"That was when we were very young. I'm happy you remember that, though." Tatsue was somewhat happier. Mitaka didn't forget the memories they shared.

They silently tidied up in this manner for a while, and Tatsue gradually felt calmer. Living all alone in the Kuroki mansion was like standing naked in a snowstorm, but this room contained a warmth that appeased her heart.

"There's really an awful lot…"

Tatsue picked up a manga volume with a relatively work-safe cover and browsed through it, flipping through the pages.

Mitaka nodded and continued with an emotionless tone, as if talking about someone else: "This takes up about eighty percent of thoughts, ninety percent of his money, and fifty percent of his memories – that's about how much Takamikado Mitaka is interested in such things. My mind would also have to undergo a lot pressure in order to throw away such things.

"Awesome! And I'm not being sarcastic." Closing the book, Tatsue said gloomily: "If I am as passionate towards something as you

are… then perhaps my life would be different."

How would her life compare with Mitaka's? Her life consisted of nothing except obedience, striving only because she wanted others to praise her. Wasn't her life so much duller? Wasn't her life completely empty?

"I should have a hobby and immerse myself in it… Actually, Mitaka, I like making dolls. Sure, I imagine my tailoring skills aren't as mature as big brother's, but it is still quite good."

"I see… after all, idols created by humans embody the imagination men have towards God and themselves. Interesting. Will you show them to me someday?"

Although Mitaka said something strange, Tatsue maintained her smile and decided to overlook it.

Her mind naturally calmed down and her heart gradually started to open itself up.

"Mmm, I'll be very happy to."

Just spending time with the person she had entrusted her heart to when they were children was a happiness that seeped all the way into Tatsue's heart.

I wish this could go on forever, she thought.

Tatsue did not forget the black flesh she saw beneath his skin the day before yesterday.

However, Tatsue felt painful no matter what may have been the reason for his transformation.

– A heartache?

Indeed. It must be so. It surprised even herself. She accepted this sentiment. It seemed she sincerely cared and loved this man, whom she had liked very much before and grew more and more reliable as time went on – this Takamikado Mitaka.

"Mitaka, you're the only one in this entire house who looks at me as Kuroki Tatsue, whereas everyone else thinks Kuroki Tatsue is 'insurance'. That makes me very happy."

Tatsue smiled genuinely like a child. Confused, Mitaka replied: "I

don't understand. Of course you are Kuroki Tatsue. I can't possibly mistake you as someone else. Is that so odd?"

"No." Tatsue shook her head and said with a soft voice full of happiness: "I am indeed Kuroki Tatsue. That is the correct answer."

Tatsue smiled. As if affected by her attitude, Mitaka smiled slightly as well. She looked at him, and suddenly felt she wanted to rely on him. With tears in her eyes, she said: "Mitaka…"

"I am so touched –"

The door was opened with a 'bam' and a girl covered in blood appeared, as if she was a zombie straight out of a horror movie.

Tatsue was frozen in fear and Mitaka screamed. The pleasant atmosphere suddenly disappeared and was replaced with the voice of the indiscreet girl: "What – I snuck up here because I felt a weird scent, but it's the same two people as before! But Mitsuki's heart is pumping. I don't really know what's going on here, but my girly heart is being hip-hop-happy!"

With the majority of her words being incomprehensible, the girl enthusiastically pointed towards the duo with her huge gloves: "Alright. Let me connect your hearts together. I am the angel, Unpleasant Counter-Current. Bringing together lovers should also be my 'role'! I should say, I should say… your anxious and loving expressing is making. Me. So. Excited!"

"…"

"…"

The girl startled as she looked at Tatsue and Mitaka, whose mouths were hanging open in shock.

"Huh? Sis, none of them are responding."

"Ki-chan, anyone would get scared if an energetic girl covered in blood pops out. By the way, did you say you're going to help them? You're going to help them? Not only are you sparing them, but you're helping – what's going on?" The intact head asked with a puzzled expression.

Mitsuki nodded and smiled innocently: “Yep. I like a world where everyone is smiling and everyone is happy. I only pray for a peaceful world where Unpleasant Counter-Current isn’t needed.”

The girl who called herself an angel waved her hand and yelled.

“I. Love. The. World!” She smiled dazzlingly.

“I. Love. Humans!” She then jumped up energetically and turned her back to Tatsue and Mitaka.

“Unpleasant Counter-Current’s greatest wish is not a singular love towards the world or towards humans, but that the world and humans would love each other!”

Finally, she turned around and said: “So I hope you can be together. Well, looks like I interrupted you today. I’m leaving now, and maybe we’ll see each other again in the near future. Everyone, everyone, looooooooooooooove, love more! Love the world – love humans – LOVE & PEACE! LOVE & PEACE!”

The incredible girl yelled with an explosive volume as she left.

Tatsue looked at Mitaka and recalled what Mitsuki said. She couldn’t help but blush.

Although she didn’t go back to the main house and spent the night in his room, she couldn’t say a single word to him out of a strange embarrassment.

– It’s not as if we love each other.

Kannonsakazaki Private High School is an ordinary school without a high university acceptance rate or an excellent extracurricular profile. Tatsue’s mother and family incessantly rebuked her for wanting to study there.

After a lengthy debate, Tatsue was allowed half a year for her folly. Six months later – in October – she would be moved to an elite female-only high school chosen by her mother.

It didn't make a difference to her. This was not an act of meaningless rebellion towards her family just for the sake of going to a normal high school. There was a reason behind Tatsue's stubbornness and unreasonable desire to attend this school.

She knew that Sakaki Guryū – the next CEO of the Sakaki Organization, the company that secretly controlled the world – was a staff member here.

This was a widespread fact amongst his inner circles. In fact, every single student in the school knew him as well.

What was the reason that Sakaki discarded his glorious future, ignored the disapprovals, and kept working at this school? That reason was widely known even in the school. Was it solely for the girl named Usagawa Rinne? Or was there some other reason?

Tatsue wanted to know that very much.

Moreover, what kept Sakaki going?

What held him up when facing the monumental responsibility of being the next CEO of the Sakaki Organization, a responsibility that almost suffocated Tatsue? Tatsue wanted to know the reason behind his strength and how he kept living so full of confidence.

It was something that Sakaki possessed, but she did not.

She sought this thing with obsession.

However, contrary to her wishes, Tatsue did not even see Sakaki in the school.

After asking some older students, she was told Sakaki hasn't turned up at the school since last winter, and that his lover Usagawa Rinne had also disappeared.

How odd – Tatsue pondered. Where could those two have gone? She kept thinking this over. After all, she had plenty of time. The curriculum was something her private tutor had taught her long ago. Moreover, in Kannonsakazaki Private High School, where it was compulsory to wear the school uniform, no one would begin a conversation with Tatsue, who always wore a dress and stood out incongruously.

That's fine. I'm not here to study or to make friends.

But – if that is true, then why does my heart full so overwhelmingly empty?

"There is a shadow behind you~~ - and you turn back to see Saibara Mitsuki!"

Tatsue, who was asking after Sakaki everywhere during lunch break, heard the thunderous voice of the girl behind her and automatically flattened herself on the ground.

"What – " Tatsue turned around with wide eyes. She saw Saibara Mitsuki dressed in the Kannonasakazaki school uniform standing behind her, complete with that round-eared hat on her head and curly tail on her behind.

"In – deed – we met again, and so soon and so unexpectedly. I am so happy." Lifting up hands clad in giant gloves, Mitsuki smiled like a child who successfully carried out a prank. It had been two weeks since she first saw her. However, now she had appeared again, just as she had prophesied yesterday in the servants' rooms in the Kuroki household.

Tatsue was both scared and surprised. Unable to move, she kept staring at the other girl.

"What – what do you want?"

Tatsue took out the fan that she hid in her dress and pointed it emphatically towards the other girl. Bluffing the best she could, Tatsue asked in a shaking voice: "Why… are you following me? And – what… what are you?"

Tatsue recalled Mitsuki's inhuman movements and regeneration speed as if the latter came straight out of a manga, and also recalled the incredible counter-attack Mitsuki exhibited after absorbing "Dragon's Breath". Tatsue already knew Mitsuki was not a normal human.

Then what was Mitsuki?

Yōkai? Monster? Alien?

"Mmm… my big sis said to me…"

"… this is my big sis." Mitsuki slightly turned to show the bag she carried behind her and smiled. "She said since we won't kill you, then we should at least subdue you and use you when we need your help."

"Ki-chan, I know honesty is a virtue, but you're far too honest."

The bag emitted a disappointed sound towards Mitsuki, who revealed all her intentions unreservedly.

But that head was a miraculous existence too. Since Mitsuki called her big sis, then they are sisters?

She was completely lost.

While Tatsue kept a reserved silence, Mitsuki smiled innocently: "Mmm, something like that."

Then she quickly grabbed Tatsue's hand and said matter-of-factly: "Let's be friends."

Tatsue was so shocked she didn't know what to say. Mitsuki looked at Tatsue with an innocent, genuine smile, a smile that nevertheless felt as if something was missing from it.

"I want to know about you, and you want to know about us, right? So let's be friends. We can be honest with each other once we're friends. It's easy as that."

She made it sound as if everything should be that way.

Be friends? Be honest with each other? Such naïve words – wasn't it you who fully intended to kill us?

For some reason, even though she was thoroughly confused, Tatsue found it impossible to refuse Mitsuki's innocent proposal.

Now Tatsue thoroughly regretted her decision.

"A Nirvana of sweetness! An Utopia of taste! A Paradise of sensations on the tongue! Oh, it is prepared so well – I will be damned if I eat any more of this stuff!"

They were within a dim café named 'Indian Bar' close to the school. Tatsue had never known this place existed, as it was beyond the

route of the tram she took to school.

But that wasn't the important part. Suburban cafés like this all had the same taste in their food. Besides, they weren't here to enjoy the food. Tatsue didn't eat snacks, so she'd only ordered a coffee.

However…

They were sitting at a four-seat table in front of an ornamental plant in the unlit café, and the girl in front of her, the one wearing a hat with round ears, was currently enjoying her chocolate parfait.

Tatsue's curiosity was tickled.

In truth, Tatsue liked sweet foods too. She whispered to Mitaka, who was also sought out by Mitsuki and dragged here, and asked him to order one serving of the same chocolate parfait. Tatsue didn't have a big appetite and knew she couldn't finish the large and seemingly impossible serving of the parfait, so she planned to share it with Mitaka.

Just for that moment, Tatsue let go of all her anxieties and doubts towards Mitsuki and only waited for the chocolate parfait to arrive.

The shop owner, who looked at them as if they were aliens, finally arrived with another chocolate parfait. Before Mitsuki, who was laughing and saying how delicious it was, Tatsue picked up her spoon and took an elegant bite - and froze.

For a moment, she thought her tongue was going to snap.

It was *so* sweet –

“Aaaaaaaaaah, uuuuuuurggghhhhhhhh, urrrrrrrrrrrr – so sweet!!!!”

People say spiciness burns the mouth.

Now Tatsue realized sweetness can also burn your mouth.

Tatsue slammed her hand on the table and writhed painfully, turning her tear-filled eyes towards Mitaka. His reaction, if anything, had been worse, as he was lying on the table and twitching after his bite of this overpowering chocolate parfait.

Tatsue rapidly gulped down some water, but that did nothing to

wipe away the infernal sweetness. She had to call the shop owner and order a cup of espresso on the spot.

“What, what, what is this? This is enough to kill a man.”

If anyone ever militarized sucrose, turning it into a lethal weapon, the ultimate result would probably be something like this chocolate parfait. The chocolate was very sweet, the creme was very sweet, the ice cream was very sweet, the syrup was very sweet, and the fruits were very sweet.

Sucrose bombarded Tatsue’s unseasoned taste sensors and flooded her brain. Just one bite was enough to produce this effect. Mitsuki, who took one gulp after another – was definitely not human.

“Hum?” With chocolate stains all around her mouth, Mitsuki tilted her head and asked incredulously: “What’s wrong, Tatsu-chan? Is it too sweet?”

“It’s not just too sweet! It’s sweet enough to make one insane! If you fed this to uncivilized primitives who have never even tasted brown sugar, they will probably die on the spot!” Tatsue yelled, her face all red with anger. She looked at Mitaka, who remained lying on the table, out of the corner of her eye. He was even more pitiable since he had taken a bigger bite of the parfait than Tatsue.

Tatsue closed her eyes and sipped her espresso with a sigh.

On the other hand, Mitsuki looked at her incredulously and continued to scoop more chocolate parfait into her mouth.

“Mmm, you can’t comprehend this delicacy? Poor Tatsu-chan.”

“Are you sure your tongue is normal? It’s not completely numb?”

That aside – Tatsue frowned with a sudden realization.

“Tatsu-chan?”

The three of them briefly introduced themselves in the café before the chocolate parfait was served. They were Kuroki Tatsue, Takamikado Mitaka, and Saibara Mitsuki. Mitsuki also introduced that head – she was Saibara Mina, Mitsuki’s sister.

“Indeed.” Mitsuki pointed at Tatsue matter-of-factly. “Your name is Tatsue, so you’re Tatsu-chan.”

She then pointed to Mitaka, who was still lying on the table and was probably dead: “He is Mitaka, so he’s Mi-chan.”

Lastly, she pointed at herself: “I am Mitsuki, so I’m Mitsu-chan. Together we are – ”

“We don’t need a group name!”

This Mitsuki girl seemed to be mad. Tatsue could not relax around her no matter what, not when she still vividly remembered how the other girl attacked them. However, Mitsuki behaved like a little animal and talked like an innocent child, enough to make one put down one’s guard.

Let us be friends, Mitsuki said.

Tatsue admitted she was not optimistic enough to believe what Mitsuki said.

However, Tatsue noticed her guard was lowering ever so slightly with Mitsuki’s straightforward expressions and cute speech. It was only that… it would be very tiresome to treat Mitsuki seriously.

“Another cup, please.”

Mitsuki said this unbelievable phrase, interrupting Tatsue’s thoughts and causing her to spit out the coffee in her mouth.

Tatsue coughed and gasped with wide open eyes: “Do, do you want to die? Do you want to die from sweets? You’re crazy!”

“Huh?” With a confused expression, Mitsuki continued: “I eat four or five cups of chocolate parfaits each time I come here.”

“Four or five cups of this stuff…” Just imagining it was terrifying enough. It would be torture.

“Ki-chan, playtime is over.” Suddenly, there came a cold voice.

Tatsue looked towards the direction where the voice came from. She saw a calm expression on the face of the head in Mitsuki’s bag, which was placed on the seat next to Mitsuki. This extraordinary woman, her long white hair tied into a braid, looked at Tatsue with an expression of barely concealed irritation: “I do apologize. You are Tatsue, right? Let’s speak business.”

“Hmm? Good, good. I would like that.”

More like Tatsue would throw up if she kept watching Mitsuki eat. A wave of burning heat rose up her chest and the discomfort spread from her throat to her stomach.

Tatsue put on a somewhat serious expression and stared straight at the head Mitsuki carried with her: “You are… Mina-san?”

“Yes.”

“She said you were sisters – and…” Even though Tatsue had been trained in all sorts of mannerisms, she did not know how to speak courteously to a head. She carefully chose her words as she inquired about a difficult matter.

“Why do you not have a body?”

“Ahh –” Mina closed her eyes and sighed. “Where should I start? Mmm, let me say first that you are our goal, Tatsue-san.”

“Me?”

These monstrous people were after me?

Tatsue was both terrified and helpless. She looked at Mitaka for support, but he was still passed out on the table thanks to the parfait. Mitsuki had already started on the second cup of chocolate parfait, and Tatsue could only continue talking with Mina.

Steeling herself, Tatsue replied with seriousness: “May I ask what do you mean by that?”

“Well –” Mina opened her eyes and stared right back at Tatsue: “Did you know there have been more and more monsters moving around lately?”

Monsters?

Tatsue had never seen any monsters, but she heard about them due to coverage on TV and in newspapers. Monsters – unknown creatures that suddenly started to be seen all over Japan.

They had also produced victims.

Teachers at school had repeatedly urged students to be careful.

After all, the serial killer known as the Long-Armed Demon was just prowling in town a few months ago. Rumor has it ten people died

from it.

Everyone was still on high alert.

That was not the fullest extent of the monsters' damage. She heard there had been disappearances in this town. As these disappearances started at the same time as the monster sightings, some had debated whether there was a connection between the two occurrences.

Tatsue nodded and posed a question: "But Mina-san, what are these monsters? Are they a new species? A mutant species? Or humans who love to kill like the Long-Armed Demon?"

"None of those." For some reason, Mina looked at Mitaka before turning her eyes back on Tatsue.

"Monsters are enemies of humankind. We hypothesize they usually hide in those planes of existence unperceived by men."

These words sounded ridiculously abrupt and unbelievable. At the same time, they were spoken by a living head, a creature alien to ordinary life, which actually made them more credible.

Mina sighed and continued: "No one knows what they are or why they appear. All we know is that they exist to kill – no, to eat – humans. Like a pestilence, monsters spread all over the world, slaughtering and devouring humans. They will linger in this world as long as humans keep living."

Strictly speaking, perhaps they are not even alive – Mina muttered.

"Well, humans are not all that weak either. Perhaps this would not be so bad after all. However, whether monsters end up eliminating humans or humans hunt them to extinction, we do not know their purpose. Were they created by men? Or are they required 'roles' in this world like us? No one knows any of that."

She looked down and furrowed her brows with dissatisfaction: "Ki-chan and I are important 'characters', responsible for dealing with monsters. But I lost – as you can see, I was defeated."

"Are… are you ok?" Tatsue couldn't help but inquire as the other woman spoke with discontent.

"Can you live only as a head? Or – are you –"

A monster too? As Tatsue hesitated whether or not to ask this, Mina narrowed her eyes as if she read the other girl's mind.

"As we are no longer humans, we could probably also be considered monsters."

Then she said quietly:

"We were once humans too."

Saibara Mitsuki's dairy, December 4th, 2006

Big sis didn't come out of her room today either. She didn't reply when I called for her. I won't be surprised even if she's died.

Whatever. Someone as depraved as big sis is better off dead.

The hospital sis worked at called this morning. Looks like sis didn't turn up to work for no reason. The lady who called herself the head nurse roared down the phone that she would fire sis if she keeps taking unapproved leaves.

I told sis this through her door, but she didn't respond. Maybe she didn't care.

All this made me late for school. I should study really hard, so I won't become someone as depraved as big sis… but even if I graduate from good schools, it would be pointless if I become someone as paranoid as big sis and lock myself in my room.

But if I don't study hard enough, I'd also be considered depraved in the Japanese society, where degrees mean everything.

Big sis needs to die soon.

I haven't brought her any food since yesterday.

Humans should die in a few days without food, right? And if sis dies, would it be my crime? Mom and Dad are the ones with the role of protecting big sis. It's all Mom and Dad's problem. I'm innocent.

I came home early because I was worried about big sis.

I saw through the window that big sis was sleeping in her bed. So

unrepentant. Leaving school early will affect my final report at the end of the year. Why did I come back just to check on big sis?

If the police search our house due to big sis's death by starvation, then this diary might be a problem.

I've decided to write in this diary one last time today, then get rid of it.

Seriously, I keep writing pointless stuff. Who's gonna repay me for all the precious time I spent writing in my diary?

Is big sis still alive? I've decided to let her die.

I did nothing wrong. I did nothing wrong.

…

(the diary ended here)

"In the distant past – there was a God." Mina continued in a calm tone.

"There was a perfect existence named 'God' at the beginning. Either it was shattered, or it was never whole to start with – I believe it was the latter. Anyways, God became scattered all over the world."

This story was so immense, so incredible, and so unbelievable. However, Tatsue continued to listen quietly.

Mitaka had already woken up. Apart from Mitsuki, who kept greedily eating the chocolate parfait, everyone at the table was very solemn.

"God broke into seven Greater Fragments and innumerable smaller Fragments. The duties of Creation, Judgement, and Governance – these Divine 'roles' – were separated into seven equal parts and entrusted to the seven Greater Fragments.

Mina stared at Tatsue and admitted freely: "We are the humans who inherited Greater Fragments. We do not know why we were chosen –"

Then she lowered her eyes and continued: "I have lost my Greater Fragment and vacated my 'role' – however, I was the 'role' that men

called Sterilization Disinfection."

Sterilization Disinfection.

A suggestive and disconcerting phrase.

"Sterilization Disinfection, Unpleasant Counter-Current, Single Room, God Mushi Emperor, Tear song, Catastrophe, The Weakest… Only seven Great Fragments were created. God Mushi Emperor called us the seven Kobito."

Mina said with some displeasure. Her usually unchanging countenance twisted with unhappiness.

The seven Kobito.

That really sounds like the seven dwarves in Snow White.

"Anyways, Catastrophe and Tear song are all fake names. I don't know their real names. Perhaps they don't even have human names. Out of convenience, most of us use the names given to us by God Mushi Emperor."

Having finished all this in one breath, Mina then continued: "The 'role' of Sterilization Disinfection is to remove the enemies of the world or to erase fallen humans – 'destroying evil' would sum it up. It is my job to kill monsters."

She looked sideways at Mitsuki, who sat next to her and eating the chocolate parfait with a trance-like expression.

"Ki-chan is Unpleasant Counter-Current. Her 'role' is retribution. Committing evil would result in the same evil being done to you. You have probably learnt about this in school, correct? Retribution-punishment according to the sin – is the Unpleasant Counter-Current within Ki-chan."

Retribution sounded like a Buddhist term. Various religions more or less have the same idea among them. Like Mina said, this moral concept had been taught time and again in families and school apart from religious teachings.

Retribution.

The ‘role’ of God punishing evil.

“She distributed punishment after having reflected back the person’s evil. Ultimately, she can kill sinners with pure justice. That also gave her the weakness of being unable to kill someone with no evil intent. Therefore, there was no purpose in considering which one of our Fragments is better.” Mina added, still looking at Tatsue.

“Let us pick up where we left off. The shattered “God” harbors the instinct to reunite all its parts and wishes to return to the perfect existence after having collected all the Fragments – that is the divine will of God. That is also my ultimate goal –”

Mina looked at Mitaka, and her expression briefly became hideous.

“– But I was hindered and failed over and over, and have yet to achieve that goal. Greater Fragments and Lesser Fragments all enter human hosts through certain processes, which allows humans to inherit them and keep this world operational… it is extremely difficult to collect Fragments.”

Fragments – these things live on humans as parasites and were spread all over the world as a result? Mina, who was chosen as a Greater Fragment, made it her goal to collect these Fragments.

The scope of this event was so immense that it was almost unimaginable. Although Tatsue could somewhat understand it, she didn’t feel it to be real, as if she had just heard a legend or a fairytale.

Looking at Mina’s head, Tatsue recalled Mitsuki’s inhuman movements from a while ago.

She then thought of her ability, Dragon’s Breath.

And the abnormal increase in the amount of monsters –

This was not a fake story, but actual fact.

“The same applies to my ability?”

Mina smiled at Tatsue’s words. “Your ability to control the wind is very similar to Tear song’s, which I am familiar with. However – you don’t have a Fragment in you.”

Tatsue didn't understand the significance of that.

But what Mina said after that shook her mindset.

"Our abilities… Take me as an example. I can spray out a mist from my spray cans, a mist that can completely annihilate anything in existence. That requires a phenomenal amount of energy. Fragments are crystallizations of immense amounts of energy. I can use my power over and over again as long as I have a Fragment."

Mina then looked at Tatsue: "But the energy within one human is pitifully small compared to a Fragment."

What did that mean?

Tatsue was starting to get a bad feeling as she looked at Mina. Mitsuki, as if she had been listening in, informed Tatsue: "Tatsu-chan, your abilities are not fully developed. I don't think you used up too much energy, but you are only a normal human. If you continue like this, you'd lose enough energy in a month for your entire existence to collapse and die."

"What –"

Die?

Tatsue didn't comprehend those words. She looked at her fingers and curled them up, then stretched them open again. She was still alive.

I will die – in a month?

It did not feel real.

"Really?"

"Ki-chan doesn't lie. She won't pull something like that." Mina's tone was mechanical as she stated these facts.

"Humans use their 'soul' – what we call energy – to move our body. Once we grow old, sick, or wounded, part of their 'soul' is spent to cure those things. Energy can be replenished from eating other living creatures. However, as expenditure usually exceeds supply, humans would die sooner or later – that was the lifespan of humans."

"Either a Greater Fragment or a Lesser Fragment would render the

holder immortal, as every Fragment is a crystallization of huge amounts of energy. Not only do we lose the concept of aging through losing energy, we also don't need to eat to replenish our energy. I don't eat chocolate parfait to survive, but only because I like it~" Mitsuki explained while smiling. She had already finished three cups of the chocolate parfait and showed no sign of slowing down anytime soon.

Tatsue couldn't think. She was been bombarded with so many truths about the world, and on top of that the conclusion that she will die. Mitaka's expression became gloomy and he murmured: "So that's why –". He seemed to have understood something.

"Well, let us end this long conversation." Mina said this as she looked at Tatsue.

"Tatsue-san, let us make a deal in order to have the best future for the both of us. Our goal is to collect all the Fragments and revert back to 'God'."

"I don't mind even if I don't return to 'God', but I will help big sis if that's what she wants." Mitsuki smiled innocently.

Tatsue realized a shade of remorse was passing over Mina's face. It was a very human expression.

But Mina's countenance soon reverted to expressionless, as she continued in a decisive tone: "I believe your goal is to obtain immortality. If you are willing to help us, then I promise to help you to evade the ever-expanding number of monsters and the certainty of your impeding death."

"We're doing this as your friends." Mitsuki interrupted her. Mina sighed at this, but the older woman soon recomposed herself: "These means of protecting your life are my part of the deal. The truths of the world I just told you are free."

Tatsue considered this. If what they said was true, then she would soon crumble and die.

Although she could feel nothing odd with her body, it would be terrifying if it was true.

If that was true – accepting the others' proposal would be the only way for Tatsue to survive.

Tatsue replied cautiously as she looked back at Mina's beautiful face: "There's no such a thing as a free deal. What do you want from me in exchange for my life?"

"Oh, don't put on that kind of scary expression. We are not devils and won't ask for your soul. Like I said, our goal is you, Tatsue-san. You are more special than you think."

Special.

This word has a strange charm for Tatsue, who had been reared as her elder brother's spare copy.

"Put bluntly, it is your ability we're after." Mina said this decisively with a serious face.

"It wasn't only that you, as a mere human, somehow has a part of Tear song's ability. As Tear song is a traitor who betrayed the goal of gathering Greater Fragments, who did not wish to revert to the form of God, I want to know if you can become the key to defeating Tear song, who was always extremely cautious… more importantly, you are an unique existence that does not exist even to my extensive knowledge."

Looking like an inhuman artwork made by a madman, the beautiful head showed an expression like a girl longing for love: "I long for more knowledge. There are perhaps facts in this world unknown even to me. I want to find them, and use them – I want to revert to the perfect whole." She looked at Tatsue with an eager, human glance.

"Help me, Tatsue-san – help me achieve that goal. I won't harm you. If you are still offended towards my rudeness from before, then you are free to boil or roast me whenever you wish."

"Why?" Tatsue, all pale, squeezed out that word.

"Why are you so…"

Why do you hope to revert to the form of 'God', even if it means you have to go through such pains?

"Well –" Mina murmured: "If you are aware that your current self is not your true self, can you endure that? If you know it's possible to become a different and bettering being, can you not wish for that? That is what I wish for. That is all."

That wish – in some ways, that is a dream.

Tatsue understood that thoroughly.

She knew how painful it is to discover she is not herself.

“I understand.” Tatsue nodded and looked at Mina.

“I don’t have a choice either way. Let alone my certain death or encountering a monster, I will be dead if you ever decide to attack me again. I also want to know the truth behind this – ability.”

Tatsue gazed at Mina. The young girl’s forced elegance was long gone. Both her shoulders and her voice shook, but the pride in her eyes refused to disappear.

“I hate leaving things half-done, so let me accompany you two sisters even to the deepest levels of Hell.”

“Tatsue –” Mitaka looked anxiously at Tatsue. However, Tatsue had made up her mind. She wanted to know exactly who she is and keep living. She really didn’t have any other choice.

“Success!” Mina smiled, then said with a soft voice.

“You won’t die now… Ki-chan!” Mitsuki just finished her chocolate parfait. Mina cast her a cold look.

“Let Tatsue-san eat your flesh.”

“Huh? Well, I don’t mind if that’s what big sis says –”

Tatsue was stunned speechless. She couldn’t believe Mitsuki would answer so easily. Eat… eat flesh? Is this some kind of metaphor? Or is it literally –

“Didn’t I explain it before?”

Mina motioned with her eyes for Tatsue to calm down, and continued: “The only way to obtain energy is to obtain a Fragment or eat other living beings. Mitsuki’s body, full with the power of her

Greater Fragment, is the best food! Compared to normal processed food, which are only energy scraps to us, she is hundreds and thousands of times greater than those, correct? You can perhaps gain an energy store even greater than an ordinary Lesser Fragment."

"But, but –"

Tatsue was perplexed. To eat human flesh – to eat the flesh of an innocent girl who was talking with her right now – how can she possibly eat it?

"Oh, haha, so you weren't serious about accompanying us to the bottom of Hell?"

Mina smiled coldly, and continued cruelly: "It is a normal to eat human flesh in Hell, no?"

That's a Buddhist creed – Mina muttered and looked up at Mitsuki.

"No. Tatsue-san, you can't turn back now. Throw away everything you believed in up to yesterday. Believe that you've completely lost your common sense and ordinary life. The world you will live in from now on is a world of myths, where human sentiments do not exist. You are now a character in the story between humanity and God."

"Mmm – is this enough for flesh?" Mitsuki muttered as a creaking sound was heard.

Nerves. Bones. Muscles. Fat. Skin.

Creak creak.

Blood.

She cut off her own arm.

"Teehee." As if she was taking off her shirt, Mitsuki smiled as she put her arm on the table.

"Good good, Tatsu-chan. You'll be saved if you eat this. If you run out of energy, you'll collapse. You'll be alright if you absorb enough energy!

"You, you –"

Freak. Crazy. Cut off her own arm then told others to eat it – so abnormal!

Tatsue had felt something wrong from the start. Mitsuki's cheerful personality was so unnatural, and she didn't seem to attach any value to her body. Her innocence was as unnatural as an inhuman angel.

"A Greater Fragment – has side effects that don't come with Lesser Fragments." Mina explained calmly to Tatsue, who was shivering: "Once we're forced to perform the 'roles' of God, our personalities would be twisted according to the needs of that 'role'. I was adjusted to desire perfection and pristine cleanliness, and detest evil. It was a personality fitting for Sterilization Disinfection – As you have seen, Unpleasant Counter-Current removed all negative thoughts from Ki-chan's mind."

Her voice echoed sadly.

"Everyone has evil thoughts, right? Envy, hatred, avarice, sadness – people without these emotions only exist in stories and not in the real world. However, in order to re-direct evil, Unpleasant Counter-Current must not have any negative emotions of her own. She must be the reincarnation of unbiased retribution and absolute justice. Therefore, all negative thoughts within Ki-chan had been completely wiped away.

She sighed and looked up at her smiling younger sister.

"Ki-chan's mind already broke under the burden of the Fragment."

"It is perhaps hard to believe this just from looking at her, but Ki-chan – she was not someone as innocent and childish as you see today."

Mina said in a groaning voice as she looked at Mitsuki. The latter was drinking from a cup of water, looking totally innocent with her giant gloves.

Mitsuki only showed a puzzled expression as if she didn't understand what they were talking about.

"The little sister in my memories – Saibara Mitsuki – is a girl who was dishonest, stubborn, and won't even be praised even if she tried

to be courteous. She had a very short temper, threw stuff, swore at others, and was a hysterical girl in general."

Tatsue couldn't help but look towards Mitsuki, She couldn't imagine that this girl, her mouth dirtied with chocolate cream and smiling optimistically, would behave in such a way.

So the adverse effect of the Greater Fragments was personality alterations?

"We were only planted with Greater Fragments a few years ago. We could not understand what was happening, had no idea, and we didn't know why Mitsuki would have such personality changes –" As Mina said this, she suddenly looked away at a distance.

"Have you heard of the Jimmu Emperor?

"Jimmu?"

She has heard of this name before.

Jimmu Emperor was the first Emperor of Japan according to the Kojiki, the record of Japanese mythologies. He was a foreign prince who arrived on Japan, slaughtered the original inhabitants, created the Yamato Empire, and created the imperialism that continued until today. He was an almost divine figure.

As Tatsue recalled what she learnt in Japanese History classes, she realized the Jimmu Emperor Mina spoke of was perhaps not the same person as the Jimmu Emperor in the Kojiki.

"The Jimmu Emperor – God Mushi Emperor – was a Greater Fragment of the same level as Disinfection Sterilization and Unpleasant Counter-Current. His 'role' was Revelations. You probably won't understand this sudden explanation, but you're free to just listen. The God Mushi Emperor split his body into six hundred and sixty-six equal parts, and each became a terminal he could remotely control. Using these parts, he will appear before those who obtained Fragments and communicate with them. That's what he is."

His 'role' is Revelations? He split his body into six hundred and sixty-six parts?

Although she couldn't understand these sudden words, Tatsue decided not to ask anything and keep listening to Mina.

The café owner had already disappeared. Mitsuki also finished her chocolate parfait. Saying “I’ll help you to make it easier to eat”, she sliced up her arm with her sole remaining hand and placed the meat into the chocolate parfait cup.

Tatsue tried her best not to look at this scene.

Even though she was apprehensive of having to eat that thing soon after, she still looked at Mina with a honest expression.

Mina also nodded. She looked up at her little sister, who kept working away innocently at her terrifying dissections, and kept talking: “The six hundred and sixty-six equal parts of God Mushi Emperor – those terminals – were called Mushi, or flying insects. They are the split-bodies of the red-eyed God Mushi Emperor, and they will definitely appear in front of people like us, who have come into possession of a Greater Fragment.”

“Mushi –” Mitaka’s eyes widened. Without noticing this, Mina continued.

“As to why they would appear – they were here to explain.”

“Explain?” Tatsue repeated this word. Mina smiled.

“Yes, just like how I am explaining these to you know.” She looked back at Tatsue and went on: “That seems to be the ‘role’ of God Mushi Emperor. Everything I am telling you now, such as Fragments, monsters, or the Seven Kobito – that knowledge was all told to me by the Mushi, those terminals of God Mushi Emperor.”

There always seemed to be some hatred in her voice. She quickly changed back to the previous topic.

“I also heard this from God Mushi Emperor – humans with a Greater Fragment inserted into them must die once. Die, and be reborn. In other words, our souls and bodies were changed. That even extended to our minds, and we became creatures very much different from what we were before.”

Mitsuki’s supernatural regeneration powers and the unbelievable strength from her frail body –

Were that all because she had a Greater Fragment inserted within

her, was resurrected, and had her flesh modified into something else?

Tatsue gave up considering those hair-splitting details, and she could only try to swallow down as much of Mina's words as possible.

She'll have to reconsider the details later.

After all, her science-oriented, logical brain would probably be more confused even if she did consider it.

Then, as if suddenly remembering her past, Mina spoke quietly.

"When I was still a human – it was a shame to admit it, but I was an antisocial recluse. Even with the hospital I was employed at – I was once a nurse – I didn't go to work. I only shut myself up in my room. I didn't want to interact with anyone, I didn't want to be hurt by anyone, and I didn't want to hurt anyone. I refused everything in the world."

It was hard to think this was how Mina was, who was now so determined and self-possessed. Did a personality change also happen on her?

Tatsue listened attentively to Mina as she thought this.

"My parents, who lived with me, who didn't care about me, soon give up on their daughter. But my little sister – Ki-chan – was different. She was an ill-tempered and obnoxious girl, but I think she was a good and gentle child. She would cook for me, do my laundry. She would lecture me almost every day and generally take care of me." Mina's face was covered with sadness and her black irises glittered.

"But Tatsue-san… at the end, that was a form of dependence."

"Dependence?"

Tatsue couldn't grasp what Mina meant. Confused, she asked: "What… does that mean?"

"Well –"

After a brief consideration, Mina replied with a calm tone: "Ki-chan was a proud girl, like all kids during their rebellious years. She

couldn't stand her surroundings and looked down on everyone else. Wouldn't such a kid be despised? Ki-chan was indeed despised. She was always alone. No one loved her, and I suppose she must have been very lonely. Therefore, she did her best to take care of me, hoping I would thank her. She always swore at me, but her fragile pride would not last without me constantly showing her my gratitude. Do you understand? That was dependence, no?"

Tatsue listened with a heavy expression. She understood very well the loneliness that came with solitude. Looking at Tatsue, Mina furrowed her brows. She decided not to think about this anymore and continued: "Ki-chan soon became completely dependent on me, who would thank her whenever she brought me food. She no longer cared about anything else. She took care of me, and was satisfied with my gratitude. She did not communicate with anyone else and only sought my affection, which was so easily given… then I decided that it should not last."

Her voice was full of agony.

"In order to stop this co-dependent existence, I stopped eating and starved myself to death. However, be it a cruel trick or no, God placed Greater Fragments into Ki-chan and I, resurrected us, and made us remain alive in such imperfection as we kept hunting for Fragments." Mina murmured as if in a rage, and then stared at Tatsue.

"Let's return to our original topic. Ki-chan, who was inserted with the Greater Fragment Unpleasant Counter-Current, mentally collapsed… no, it's more appropriate to say her personally was split in half. There is the current Ki-chan, who was tasked with 'completely removing evil', and the secondary personality that only employs 'the evil that was removed'."

"Split personality?"

Tatsue would occasionally watch some odd television programs in secret, and this name instantly jumped out of her mouth. Patients with split personality syndrome are said to have two different personalities. It is more appropriately named dissociative identity disorder when considered as a psychiatric disorder.

Mina nodded: “Yes. Mitsuki usually has the personality of the angel Unpleasant Counter-Current and deals out retribution with absolute justice. If she ever hates someone, or find someone detestable, she would no longer be able to judge others with justice. Then…”

As if fearing for something, Mina’s voice shook: “Ki-chan’s personality would switch to the fallen angel, Unpleasant Counter-Current, when she bears evil thoughts towards someone else. The fallen angel, Unpleasant Counter-Current, knows only the evil it had gathered. It will keep rampaging, killing, destroying, until the power of its Fragment runs out. At the end –”

Her voice was calm, and yet perturbed.

“– it is said she will spend her Fragment till its last drop, until she herself breaks down and dies.”

The music was more like ear-shattering noise than anything else, and the female singer’s voice cracked like the sound of a knife slicing through the skull. The cheap CD Walkman was unable to reproduce the songs of the singer named “Kingdom of Witches”, and even her rather unique and incomprehensible lyrics were reduced to muddled statics. “What I pity. I do like her creepy lyrics –” Nageki Kurukiyo thought to himself.

He was a strange man.

He wore an old jacket and held a twisted cigarette in his mouth. He had a short stubble that made it hard to recognize his true looks, and the way he reclined oddly in the shadows of a building made him look more like a homeless man. Even the most famous detective would not be able to deduce him as a policeman from his looks alone.

“But yes, it’s getting warmer and more spring-like, but the nights are still rather chilly.”

Nageki said to himself as he slowly removed his headphones. It was the middle of the night. There was no one about and the location was completely silent. Moonlight lit up the sky brilliantly as the innumerable buildings cast deep shadows on the ground.

Nageki hid within one of those shadows and observed his surroundings.

Nageki Kurukiyo was a detective that worked specifically on homicide cases.

That was why he was currently pursuing the incredible recent events, consisting of many homicide cases with unknown culprits that may be connected.

All the witnesses declared they saw ‘monsters’, and all the victims were indeed mangled as if they were chewed up by a beast. The police was baffled. Therefore, working on the hypothesis that a dangerous wild animal had been let loose, he started a large-scale investigation to uncover the truth. However…

Nageki pursed his lips and murmured with irritation: “If we’re fighting against a monster, then this burden is too heavy for the police force to bear!”

There are indeed creatures that can be considered as monsters in this world.

They are unknown aliens, sworn enemies to humanity. Nageki had only seen them a few times, but he was already quite acquainted with monsters.

Nageki’s beloved girlfriend was killed by a monster.

He wanted revenge. Nageki hated monsters and pursued them.

“Oh, I am terrified, are you a ghost or a tiger?”

An old coarse voice suddenly appeared out of nowhere.

Nageki reacted instantly, standing up and reaching towards the pistols on his belt. As if mocking him, the voice sighed calmly.

“Ohoho, you look like – a normal human. How did you find out about this place?”

Nageki stood alone in this seaside industrial district littered with tall buildings. This was not a residential block and did not have many commercial establishments, with barely anyone visiting the area at all. Therefore, this was the best place for conducting secrets one wouldn't want others to know.

Still keeping his guard up, Nageki questioned in an even tone: "Who might you be? Don't be shy. Come out. I would be very happy to meet you."

There was no sign of the speaker in the cold air. Although he didn't know who the other person was, Nageki was already lucky to have established contact like this.

"Ohoho, my name is Tearsong. Apologies, I'm very shy, so I won't be showing myself. But you… answer me, how did you find this place?"

"Hehehe." Nageki laughed dismissively. He tied back his fringe to see better, then pointed at the sky enthusiastically: "Of course – how do you say this? The deductions of a famous detective."

"You placed a tracking device on one of the people I abducted, didn't you?" The voice laughed, completely ignoring Nageki's words. "That's what I get for abducting people at random. I didn't think a detective would be able to predict the next person to be abducted and put a tracking device, consequently finding this place –"

"Well, don't ask for confirmation if you knew it already. Won't it make me look silly?"

Nageki shrugged and kept questioning with a serious voice: "So, Melody, what did you do with the people you abducted? Just abduction alone is enough for legal action."

"Don't call me with a name as cute as Melody." Faced with the defiant tone of the other person, Nageki laughed without losing his composure.

"But Melody – you're a woman, no?"

Tearsong drew in a sharp breath and her voice became mixed with anxiety: "W-why would you say that?"

Nageki knew he guessed right, judging from her tone. He explained evenly: “There’s the odd sense of someone forcing herself to speak like an old person. There’s guessing your true tone from your accents and vocabulary choices. There is also guessing your real voice based on your altered voice – I am a detective after all, and I know all these tricks. It’s not rare for criminals to change their voice through a program or device.”

Nageki smiled, but Tearsong replied with a surprisingly cold tone: “I thought you were only an odd detective, but – you knew it all, don’t you?”

Was that her true voice? It was quiet and shaken, not quite sane.

Shivers ran down Nageki’s spine when he heard her real, ominous voice.

“I killed everyone who knew anything about me. I killed all who knew about my past, all who knew my name, all who knew my gender, all who knew my blood type, birth sign, address, hair style, eye color, tone, or ability. It’s terrifying terrifying terrifying. I’m afraid of death, afraid of enemies. Anything that can threaten my life is absolutely terrifying to me!”

As if possessed, she said this all at once, followed by a calm declaration: “Die. You must die for my peace of mind. I must remain a secret in the ultimate sense of the word. Die, die die die. I will destroy your existence, annihilate your past. I won’t even let a single strand of your hair or a single piece of your DNA remain in this world.”

After her unrestrained pronouncement, people appeared on top of the numerous factory building. There were countless people, people with red eyes.

As Nageki prepared for a fight, Tearsong screamed: “My dear comrades, the terminals of God Mushi Emperor – Mushi! Kill that man. Conduct the blood sacrifice. Completely reduce his chance of survival to below zero. I permit you to consume his corpse, suck his blood dry! Mince up his soul, shatter his life, let his existence completely disappear! Kill him!!”

Those people called Mushi quietly approached Nageki with insect-like movements. Nageki rapidly pulled out two pistols and fired at their thighs and ankles.

“What –”

They did not stop.

They should have experienced excruciating pain, unbearable to normal humans. However, those Mushi dragged their legs and crawled towards Nageki on their arms. There were no emotions in their eyes. They simply – instinctively – wanted to execute Nageki.

“Uwah – these things are disgusting!”

There was no point in keep shooting.

Having run out of bullets, Nageki hurried to put in a new cartridge.

“Hehe…” Relaxed, Tearsong looked at Nageki and laughed mockingly.

“Two pistols? What an interesting detective. But sadly you will die here today. Those Mushi cannot be stopped, unless you kill then. Your bullets should run out soon. Then you’ll be crushed by the overwhelming amount of Mushi. Watching you die amidst your futile resistance can perhaps appease my previous terror.”

That voice annoyed Nageki. He yelled: “There’s something else I figured out from Melody’s voice – you are between thirty-five to forty years old – your accent sounds foreign – your first language is English, and you arrived in Japan during your teenage years!”

“Shut up –”

Although he was somewhat satisfied to hear Tearsong’s screams of rage, Nageki held up his guns and muttered quietly.

“Ahh – Ume-chan, I’m sorry, I might not make it back…”

The Melancholic Detective, Nageki Kurokiyo – disappeared in the abandoned industrial district.

Night 3: Distancing happiness

Humans are life forms capable of adapting to change, Tatsue mused. *Rather, all life forms are essentially adaptable to change. They adapt to the various environments on earth and evolve into suitable forms. Though they live and prosper for a short period of time compared to the lifespan of the earth, they continue on.*

God first created the heavens and the earth.

Then He placed water and wind into their midst.

He grew plants, gave habitats to animals -

And finally stopped after creating humans in His own likeness.

God only created our basic physical forms. That is why humans kept failing, kept making mistakes over and over. Some races perished, and countries slaughtered each other.

But still they overcame disasters, wars, and pestilence.

Humans are still alive.

They adapted to all kinds of environments, even though their unsightly demeanor was so foolish it became impossible to be compared with that of the perfect being, that of God.

“Dragon’s Breath!”

Three weeks had passed since that time.

Time passed surprisingly quickly for Tatsue. At school, the cherry blossom flowers that had graced the start-of-school ceremony had long wilted. The sunlight also felt warm on her skin, making one almost forget that abnormal monsters were still slaughtering humans every day.

The Earth continued to turn.

Humanity had not yet perished.

And Tatsue, inconceivably, felt very happy.

“Now - the monster has stopped moving!”

“Understood!”

Mitsuki walked toward the large dragonfly-like monster, which had been frightened by Tatsue’s Dragon’s Breath. She suddenly sprang forward, leapt into the air, and stomped hard on its head.

“Eeahaaaaaa!”

The monster let out an ear-splitting scream. Its skull cracked and it died on the spot. Oddly-colored body fluids splattered over the ground, staining Mitsuki’s snow-white skin and socks.

Sending off the monster, which instantly metamorphosed into dust, Mitsuki raised her big glove.

Her right arm, which Tatsue had been forced to consume while howling and crying in reluctance, had completely regenerated in three short weeks.

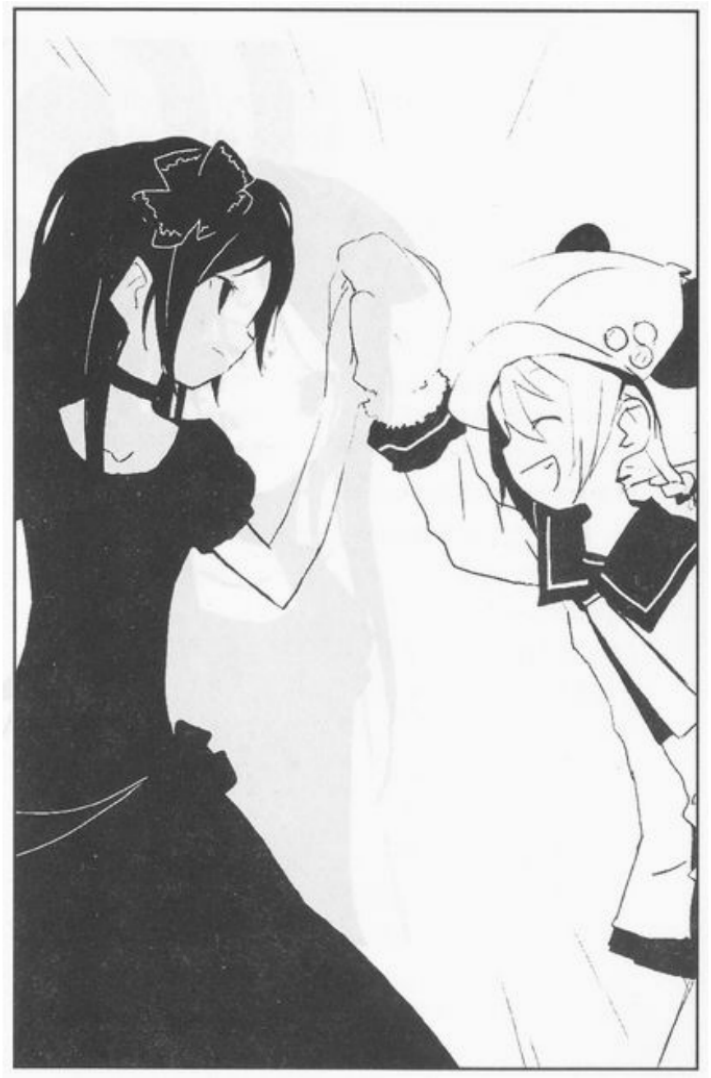
“Tatsu-chan.”

Because Mitsuki was suddenly looking at her, Tatsue’s cheeks reddened slightly, and she also raised her own hand.

“Mitsu-chan.”

She high-fived Mitsuki, who was running towards her. Then, smiling, Mitsuki announced: “We are the strongest.”

“The strongest!”



After performing the “important lines” Mitsuki had assigned with a disjointed voice and movement, Tatsue could not take it anymore. She stared at Mitsuki, who was shouting in excitement, and said: “Ki-chan, can we not say those “important lines” anymore? I feel very embarrassed.”

“Eh?”

Mitsuki showed a very disapproving expression. Why? Tatsue always felt she was the one at fault whenever Mitsuki showed that expression. It was truly strange.

“Good work.”

Mitaka, who had been resting under the shade of the tree, walked over carrying Mina's head.

They were at a children's park near the school, having rushed over when Mitaka contacted them after sensing some monster activity. Mitsuki and Tatsue had united their efforts and dealt with the opponent before any victims appeared.

Ever since they negotiated to form a cooperative relationship, Tatsue's company of four had enthusiastically hunted monsters like this.

According to Mina, they seemed to 'want to closely examine Tatsue's ability during actual combat'. She could also fulfill the 'role' of Sterilization Disinfection along the way - it felt like killing two birds with one stone.

But Tatsue did not mind.

A tense atmosphere had pervaded the Kuroki household ever since her home tutor threw the resignation letter at her mother. She did not know what she went to school for, either. To be honest, she felt from the bottom of her heart that the time the four of them spent together was very happy.

It was fun once they had gotten used to each other - with Mitsuki, and with Mina.

"However –"

Mitaka handed towels and soft drinks to the sweating duo, doing things befitting the manager of a sport club, while a self-effacing smile surfaced on his face.

"Either Tatsue or Mitsuki won't actually need me here, right?"

"Nothing of that sort."

Mina showed a rare smile, raising her eyes toward Mitaka, who was carrying her: "As long as you are watching, a certain someone will face battles enthusiastically. Really, in three short weeks, that certain someone seems to have become a different person, becoming powerful and resolute — ah, allow me to use a cliché, but the power of love is truly great!"

"M, Mina-san! Wha, what lo, love?" Tatsue's entire face reddened

and she flapped the fan in her hand with a patter-patter sound.

”Please don’t talk like that, okay? I, of course I don’t -”

”Oh, hehe, but no one said it was you, Tatsue-san? Your face is red. That’s really cute, hehe.”

Tatsue felt her face heating up as if it were boiling, and walked away in the other direction while shouting “I don’t know, hmph!” It was early morning, and both Mitsuki and Mitaka were wearing their school uniform, since they intended to go to school next.

Mitaka gave me a grapefruit-flavored canned drink… Did he pick this because he remembers what flavor I like? As she thought thus, Tatsue’s face flushed even redder.

Ahah, really, our relationship should have already moved on from this sort of feelings.

It was meant to be a cold relationship, one in which he would avoid me and I would feel disappointed with him. Mitaka really had changed. He came to regard me as an important person and… he has become more handsome.

What’s wrong with me?

This really isn’t good.

Fortunately or not, Mitaka didn’t seem to notice my mood.

Mitsuki took Mina out of Mitaka’s hands, putting her into her bag as she followed behind Tatsue.

”Big sis is being a bully. Of course Tatsu-chan would be angry.”

”Ahh seriously, hehe, frustrated for one moment and shy in the next, just why are humans so cute?”

It was truly difficult to imagine that the two people making this sort of conversation were two of the seven Great Fragments of God.

They were a little strange, but they were human sisters, not monsters.

Ever since they had formed an alliance in the coffee shop, and – while expecting certain death – obtained everlasting life by consuming the arm that Mitsuki cut off, Tatsue had gained a lot of

things after she started going around with them like this. She gained smiles, the feeling of being able to share her thoughts, and companions.

In summary, it was friendship.

At first, when she was attacked out of nowhere, she only thought they were a terrifying immortal girl and a head, but she now thought they were cute, more lovable than her family members who treated her as insurance for her brother.

Of course, she also saw the childhood friend who followed her as very important.

“But, Mitaka…” there was some confusion mixed in Tatsue’s voice.

”How do you sense the existence of monsters every time? It’s always you who contacts us, right? Even though Mina-san and Ki-chan more or less have the same kind of ability, your monster-finding ability is so much more acute than theirs.”

In response to Tatsue’s words, Mitaka opened his mouth and shut it again. Though Mitaka often said incongruous things, he would always give a solid answer to questions. Therefore, this ambiguous silence made Tatsue very suspicious.

After staying silent for a while, Mitaka murmured as if talking to himself: ”I…”

Tatsue waited for him to go on, but Mitaka only said ‘I’ before falling silent. Tatsue gave up the questioning, and raised her head to gaze at the Kannonsakazaki Private High School buildings rising before her eyes.

Tatsue walked toward Mitsuki, who hurried past Mitaka and was calling loudly, “What’s going on? I’m about to overtake you.”

Mitaka’s voice came from behind her.

It was a grief-stricken sound full of despair.

“I – What should I do?”

Mm, mm.

Ah, ‘angels’ refer in general to messengers from the heavens, the spokespeople of God’s will, a collective title for the agents of God. That is because they serve God and carry out His orders.

Ah, they are therefore saints.

The angels that everyone is thinking about should be the angels from Christianity, on whose backs grow white feathered wings.

Those feathered wings were added by artists in posterity in order to make the drawings look more beautiful. The original angels were given the same form as humans.

They were born in human form, and one day they may move in next door to you, and help people out of their good nature — in contrast, they also gave out punishment. Whether to give punishment or help was contingent on the will of the just God, and thus all their decisions were justified. Punishment was a penalty equivalent to the crime committed, and would not cause excessive harm to the subject. If a human had a bad component, only the bad component would be eliminated.

Angels were supported by people who have goodness in their hearts and did things honestly. That was because as long as one lived honestly, one could be saved by divine fairness.

In contrast, the people called devil-worshipers loathed angels. The purpose of angels was - is to give the world the order born of goodness, and this is also God’s will.

But these angels were ultimately only God’s spokespeople, not God Himself.

And thus they, like humans, could become lost, and could fall, too.

Once an angel starts to hate someone else, or becomes jealous of God, it will become a fallen angel and completely lose its divine power. An angel that became a fallen angel curses God, hopes for chaos in the world, and — depending on circumstances — might torture and kill large numbers of humans.

Ah, in summary, because God is constantly watching, an angel would – at least while he is still an angel - pay attention to —

Hey, are you all listening or not?

Really, young people these days.

“Hey, did you understand what that pig-head of a Dean of Academic Affairs said?”

“Nope, didn’t get it at all, cos I fell asleep thinking it was going to be a tirade. I did hear a little bit, something about angels and God? What the hell? What’s with that pig head? Did that pig get hooked on religion?”

“Since you were asleep… Megumi-chan, did you hear what the teacher said at the end?”

“Eh, I don’t know. What did he say?”

“Hmph, I’ll set some homework for you bunch of inattentive people. Hand back these three sheets of paper before tomorrow. Hmph.”

“Uwah? Papers I’ve never seen before appeared on the table! Go die, go die! Pig…”

This was the classroom of Kannonsakazaki Private High School Class 1-C, which had just finished its world history class. Perhaps because of a bad mood, the Dean of Academic Affairs insisted on giving them a large pile of homework, causing the sound of swearing to fill the air. Some loudly called for a boycott, some split the work in small groups, some single-mindedly insulted the Dean; almost all the students were cursing him.

Mitsuki, with the sensibility unique to Unpleasant Counter-Current, read that mood, and felt a kind of nausea slightly resembling drunkenness. In the midst of this, a classmate who was already on good speaking terms with her, said: “Hey, Saibara, are you good with world history? Can we please split the homework in half?”

“Eh? Huh?” Mitsuki was a little surprised. She looked at the contents of the paper the other handed her, and her confused face showed a troubled expression.

Because her expression became more and more pained, the other girl started to panic: “Sorry, sorry, you don’t know, do you? I’ll ask someone else for help…”

“Ah, wait, wait, Megumi-chan.” Mitsuki grabbed her shoulder,

pulled her back, then looked toward Tatsue sitting nearby: “Hey, hey, Tatsu-chan, do you want to do the homework together? You look like you’re good at studying?”

“Eh?” Tatsue happened to be dozing off, unconsciously playing with her hair. At Mitsuki’s call, she opened her eyes wide in shock.

“M, me?”

“Ah…”

The girl talking to Mitsuki backed away slightly. Perhaps it was because Tatsue always wore a dress in Kannonsakazaki Private High School where it was compulsory to wear uniforms, or because she radiated a distancing aura of elegance all over and was rarely seen talking with classmates.

However, Tatsue currently looked like she was very bored.

Mitsuki nodded, and giggled.

“Mm. All right. Megumi-chan’s head hurt with this. I can’t finish it myself either, so I can only ask Tatsu-chan for help.”

“Pass me the homework.”

Tatsue skimmed the three sheets of paper, and said as if stating the obvious: “Mm, at this rate, three minutes should suffice.”

“Ehhhhhhhhhhhh?!”

Suddenly.

The surrounding students gave an exclamation of shock – it seemed they have been eavesdropping quietly.

And then, in unison, they began interrogating Tatsue.

“Ku, Kuroki-san, really? You really can finish it in three minutes?”

“Err… yes, really. Can’t you?”

“Uwah, this is terrible, she treated me like an idiot, just like that!”

“What are you saying, treated like an idiot – anyone would think that Megumi-chan IS an idiot!”

“Whaaa! Don’t call me idiot! Don’t lump me with Miku-nee! I’m not an idiot! Not an idiot! You can grow big boobs and go die!”

“Huh? Don’t pull me –”

Tatsue had caused a considerable disturbance.

Homework was an external enemy that invaded students’ free time – something like an evil invader from another dimension. Tatsue, who boasted she could defeat it in three minutes, instantly become the class heroine. In fact, Tatsue easily filled in the questions as if she had known the answers before even looking at the question, and finished the homework before the three minutes were up.

Screams arose from all directions. Everyone clapped and cheered, and Tatsue was within a storm of praise.

Yes, everyone must have wondered about Tatsue all along. What kind of girl was she? Even though she always wore a serious expression, she must be a really great girl.

Therefore.

“Tatsu-chan.” Mitsuki smiled like a blossoming flower and looked at Tatsue, who was in the middle of classmates grabbing the filled-in sheets of paper from each other and putting up an ugly fight.

She stretched out her hand, and did a thumb-up pose.

“Squeak.”

“That — how could I understand just a ‘squeak’? Speak human, Ki-chan.”

Tatsue said, smiling happily.

The world is at peace, and people are happy.

Very happily, Mitsuki looked at this lovely present moment.

Monsters are born with the form of a monster.

Think about it. They could not have been an evil existence from the very beginning.

For example – a gun that killed, or a disaster that struck at a civilization – these things were not evil in their essence.

Could a molecule of iron that made up the body of a gun be evil?

And hurricanes that blew down trees are only harmless winds at their very root.

Could winds be so essentially evil to the point that they should not exist at all?

All things are only called 'evil' the moment they bring harm to men.

Be it guns, hurricanes, beasts, nations, and of course including —

Humans.

Then what of monsters?

Having been bestowed with the inescapable instinct to 'eat humans' since the moment of their birth, monsters are likely to be viewed by human society as evil throughout their lives.

Then what of – me?

"Katata, katakata."

The tram gave off a smooth sound, speeding along the rails. This was a perfectly ordinary tram stopping at every station, and now that it was a late, there were not many passengers. "Takamikado Mitaka", who had occupied a spacious seat, looked tiredly at the two girls at his side, who leaned their heads against his body and were sleeping deeply.

They caught several monsters after classes finished and were now riding the tram home.

For reasons unknown, both girls seemed unusually tired today and said to 'Mitaka': "Be my pillow!" "Me too, me too." They had fallen asleep, snoring, before getting his actual consent.

Mitsuki leaned against "Mitaka's" shoulder, and Tatsue used his

knee as a pillow.

The bag containing Mina was on Mitsuki's lap, and only a tail-like braid showed from the opening of the bag.

It was pitch black outside the car window. Streetlights flashed past at regular intervals.

The slow speed of the tram was smooth and steady, uninterrupted by uncomfortable jerks or stops. That, together with the two girls' warmth, made "Mitaka" rather sleepy as well. He narrowed his eyes, gazing at what looked like a middle school student fiddling with his mobile phone, a boy who had probably just finished extracurriculars and was going home, and an adult who wore an expression of exhaustion. Restless, his gaze moved to the advertisement in the car. He quickly got tired of looking at that, too, and shut his eyes.

"Mitaka" dozed, and contemplated.

"Mitaka" did not remember the circumstances of his birth. When he gained consciousness, he had already grown up in the form of a snake and possessed substantial knowledge without having been taught anything. Only his duty of collecting Apples and becoming an immortal – only this instinct controlled his heart like it was the most natural thing.

He knew his father and grandfather all carried the same destiny as him, and died before reaching their goal. That was pitiful. Therefore, he had been alone for all these decades, with no friends or family in the world he could rely on, living only for his pursuit of Apples as if grasping at straws.

And sometimes he even impersonated humans to hurt his enemies.

I am a monster, and I am an evil existence to human society.

I had once been indifferent to that. Even if I were not accepted by humans, I am a descendant of the great race of Snakes.

That fact became a sort of pride that protected him.

Nevertheless, half a year ago -

He met her. The girl Gankyū Eguriko, who blocked his way and obstructed him from obtaining Apples, completely undid "Mitaka's"

reason for existence.

No one will praise you.

“Mitaka” remembered that. Every one of her words pierced his heart. The goal that he had previously believed in unconditionally and regarded as his future, the instinct deep in his heart – she had defeated it all.

Why do I want to find Apples?

Why do I hope to live forever?

Am I really just living to fulfill the dreams of my ancestors and follow the instincts of a snake?

“Mitaka” opened his eyes and quietly looked at Tatsue.

“If it is God who created all living things and their instincts, then am I only a puppet controlled by God? That makes me so angry – I am the Snake, the last descendant of a clan which in ancient times betrayed God and left Him desolate.”

He petted Tatsue, who was murmuring in her sleep. It wasn’t clear if she was having a bad dream or was just not sleeping well.

“Who cares about instinct or fate — do your best to make arrangements, God! I will betray you again. I am the Snake, and only I will never do as you wish! That’s right. I will go find the meaning of my life and then, one day, I will obtain immortality for you to see!”

“Mitaka” looked at no one in particular, murmuring to himself, then sighed.

He had always been alone all this time.

For “Mitaka”, the body heat of the two girls resting against him was the first time he felt the warmth of other people – he felt they were very adorable.

Truly, from the bottom of his heart, “Mitaka” felt very happy at this very moment.

But at the same time –

He carried a sense of guilt in his heart.

Because the “Mitaka” who let them lean against him in relief was not Takamikado Mitaka –

But a monster who ate him and then impersonated him.

This fact made “Mitaka’s” heart sink, and wild suspicions frustratingly arose in his mind.

This “Mitaka” who finds them adorable – is this really me?

What are ‘your’ dreams? What is ‘your’ objective? Who are ‘you’? The young girl who had ruined everything for “Mitaka” had once asked.

“I—“

I really think Tatsue is adorable from the bottom of my heart.

Kuroki Tatsue, who lived and was expected by everyone to be a mere substitute for her illustrious big brother, who told herself again and again that ‘I am me’, a girl who was a little bird singing in her cage.

She was the complete opposite of “Mitaka”, who only followed the last wishes of past ancestors and lived on without a sense of self. For that, “Mitaka” respected and admired her.

At the beginning, he had thought it was because of the residual memories of Tatsue within Takamikado Mitaka’s body and his affection for her. But now, “Mitaka” himself thought she was important to him.

She who had run to his room, eyes swollen from crying.

It had made “Mitaka” want to help her from the bottom of his heart.

But are these my true feelings? Or am I being controlled again?
“Mitaka” did not understand his thoughts or reasons, and did not know where his intentions lay.

Who am I?

What should I do?

“What should I do? Takamikado Mitaka…”

With a desolate expression, “Mitaka” caressed Tatsue’s face, feeling as if he were about to be beaten down by guilt.

The object of her trust and reliance, whom she leant her slender body against like this, is not me. Not ***me****.*

The snake without a name continued asking and answering his own unanswerable questions.

Who am I?

Why am I alive?

What is my goal?

“You and Ki-chan are very much alike.”

Mina’s voice suddenly came from inside the bag.

Perhaps it was because she heard “Mitaka’s” musings, but there was nothing of the usual slight haughtiness in her tone: “Once upon a time, my sister was a very detestable girl. She tried hard and persisted to reach frivolous goals. Stubborn. Looking down on other people. Never liked anybody. Never knew why she wanted to climb upward, but set her sights high. Always alone, not a very lovable girl.”

Because she was hiding in the bag, “Mitaka” could not see her expression.

“I was tired of everything at that time and locked myself in my room, refusing everything. But Ki-chan never abandoned me till the end. I really hated other people then, hated this entire world, and gave up on trying to keep living, only wishing for a perfect death.” There was only bitter regret in her voice.

“Ki-chan cared for me when I was like that. She was content with the thought that ‘my sister still needs me. I am not a person the world does not need’. She lived very, very humbly.”

Why did she want to say this?

“Mitaka” thought this, but continued to listen attentively.

“The older sister relying on the younger sister. The younger sister relying on the older sister. The older sister whiling the days away, the younger keeping her self-esteem. At that time I thought this could not go on forever. So one day, after Ki-chan threw a tantrum and did not bring me food, I stopped eating completely. However, Ki-chan immediately regretted it – she is really a gentle girl. She came to knock at my door several times and called out to me. She brought me food, but I ignored her.” She calmly spoke of these past events.

“And I starved to death.”

“Psst,” she laughed amiably: “very silly, right? Stupid? Hopeless? However, God lodged Sterilization Disinfection into me when I should have died, and gave me eternal life. I don’t know what it was that He noticed in me. The digestive organ Sterilization Disinfection and the excretory organ Unpleasant Counter-Current seemed to be a set. Therefore Ki-chan, who was closest to me at the time, was lodged with Unpleasant Counter-Current, and her mind was completely shattered.” The bag shivered slightly, as if trembling in pain.

“So I hate this all. Ki-chan could have been happy. Without her sister being a big burden, without needing to rely on me, Ki-chan should be able to continue to live using her own strength. I hurt her, and I will definitely not forgive the God who gave us such a destiny.”

“Mitaka” picked up the bag containing Mina and saw the white-haired head trembling.

“So I want to become God. I want to gather all the Fragments and become a complete and omnipotent entity. Then I want to know why God chose us and get Ki-chan to regain her original form. This time I will definitely let that child live in the happiness she deserves.”

With his hands, ‘Mitaka’ turned Mina toward himself. Mina glared at him: “In order to achieve that goal, I am willing to become a demon or a monster. In order to let Ki-chan, shattered, regain her original form, I will defeat everybody without hesitation, over and over – even if that is not what Ki-chan really wants.”

She raised her head and said to Mitaka.

““Mitaka”, no one said monsters cannot obtain happiness, right? I know Tatsue-san is of great importance to you, and I also know you feel guilty over your feelings towards her. But please, don’t be afraid. I beg you, pursue your happiness.”

Then, looking like she was about to cry, she continued murmuring: “Let us see your precedent, that monsters too can be happy! Sometimes I feel very afraid – God might already have ordained those like us will never obtain happiness.”

One of the two sisters who broke down in misfortune fell silent.

Does God hope we will never be happy, that we will always exist as villains, only to be hated and killed? Decreed to never obtain happiness?

This sort of thing is impossible.

But Tatsue would definitely hate me if she knew who I truly am.

Monsters and humans living happily together – this sort of thing is just impossible.

When he came to himself, a person was standing in front of him.

Clang, clang, clang.

The tram continued to move, stopping occasionally at a station, letting off people who had reached their stop and were preparing to go home, then taking on another load. It was moving forward along the rails just like it did everyday. Outside the window, the completely darkened sky was pitch black, and there was no change in the scenery from inside the car either. He had overlooked what was happening, as he did not pay particular attention to the people getting on and off.

“Monsters can also be happy!” He could not sense the presence of a human.

“As long as the people important to you accept you and stay by your side,” the voice was emotionless.

“But **you** cannot be happy.”

The girl who held a spoon in her left hand looked in this direction with pale, gun-barrel-like red eyes.

She had a unique wolf-like haircut and wore men’s casual clothing.

Gankyū Eguriko, the girl who had once ruined everything for “Mitaka”, calmly said: “Because you will all die here.”

Before “Mitaka” realized what was going on, she had already expressionlessly flung the spoon in his direction.

Memories lodge in the flesh, and abilities also accompany the flesh. It may be easier to understand if we use the analogy of a car – even a very powerful car is unable to move without fuel. And the fuel of humans, the power needed in order to move, is the soul.

Takamikado Mitaka’s physical body contained memories and knew how to move its arms and feet. He did have childhood memories of fighting, even though those were preciously few. Skills of hitting, attacking, or defending against others had been preserved in the form of memories.

Though less proficient than the ordinary person, his physical body did have the ability to move. If “Mitaka” had at least one Apple, those giant crystallization of energy, he could use a strength many time greater than his mundane abilities and battle against this girl in front of him.

However, the soul in this body was pitifully sparse.

“Mitaka” had lost to her despite having two Apples half a year ago. Now, using his and Mitaka’s weak body, only possessing the standard soul of a living being, how was he going to be victorious over her?

“Gankyū – Eguriko –”

“Mitaka’s” whole body trembled and the fear from half a year ago was awakened again. His pupils dilated, and his body stiffened.

Someone to his side blocked the silver spoon thrust toward him.

She had a hat with round ears, wore a curly tail ornament, and had her hair tied up in two pigtails.

Expressionless, Mitsuki used her giant gloves to block the spoon. Guriko couldn’t help but frown.

“Who are you –” Alarmed, Guriko leapt backwards and lowered her body, standing near the car door where people alighted and exited. “And what’s with those gloves?”

“Hey –”

With a sound of shock and terror that was completely contrary to her usual happy tone, Mitsuki asked: “Sis, was what Mi-chan said actually real?”

“Hehe,” Mitsuki laughed evilly.

“Is she really, truly, Gankyū Eguriko?”

The tram kept moving. A few passengers looked this way with confusion. However, as no disturbances so far required timely intervention, they remained as onlookers. After all, no one would think the spoons in the girl's hand were actually weapons capable of murder.

Clang, clang, clang.

Standing in the tram that wobbled softly, Mitsuki hugged her own head with her giant gloves.

"Aaaah – "

Perhaps noticing the ruckus, Tatsue half-opened her eyes. However, her mind was perhaps still muddled, and she grasped the rim of "Mitaka's" uniform tightly.

Mitsuki started to shiver slightly as she looked at the two of them: "Ahh, I can't hold it back, I can't. Aaaah, haaaahhhh, Gankyū – Eguriko? You made Sis's body like this and made her suffer. Unforgivable. Sis is somebody that I absolutely need, but you wanted to kill her. Unforgivable. Unforgivable."

Her tune and voice had all altered – whose voice was this?

Memories reside within the flesh.

Personalities were also attached to the body.

However, Mina said the memories and the personality residing within Mitsuki's body became twisted due to the side effects of the Greater Fragment.

Therefore, who was currently speaking such words full of anger?

It was almost as if this Saibara Mitsuki here was a different person to the girl who acted innocently during the times they spend together.

"I hate…" Mitsuki muttered to herself then brought her giant glove to her mouth.

"Heh? No, no. I can't hate anyone. I am the Angel, Unpleasant Counter-current – aaah, so despicable, so detestable. You dared to destroy and take away the happiness shared by Sis and I -"

Just briefly, Mitsuki shook her head and resumed her innocent

visage. However, she soon put on a ferocious expression again and glared at Guriko, whose countenance was full of incomprehension.

“It’s all your –” She stood up and moved Guriko in a speed faster than the eye could see.

“It’s all your faaaauuuullllllt!”

Facing Mitsuki’s inhuman movements, Guriko’s reactions seemed to be one beat too slow. She hurried to block, but didn’t make it – Mitsuki’s hand grabbed Guriko’s face.

Then, the back of Guriko’s head was slammed into the car door.

The glass, which should be reasonably tough, cracked. The passengers screamed, and the inside of the car was instantly dominated by madness and chaos.

– Mitsuki?

“If only you – yooouuu – YOU – YOOOUUUU – didn’t bother us!”

“Ki-chan, stop!” Mina screamed inside the bag. She shouted at her sister, who was decorated with the screams of others and had completely changed, facing the scattered shards of glass and the unmistakable sight of Guriko’s blood: “Please, stop! Mitaka, hurry and stop Ki-chan!”

“Um – errr.”

‘Mitaka’ awkwardly thought that he would never be able to stop Mitsuki and her monstrous strength as he yelled: “Mitsuki, stop! She’s very dangerous – let’s escape!”

“Ki-chan, what are you doing?”

Tatsue seemed to have completely woken up. She sat up, staring at Mitsuki’s back. Of course, neither ‘Mitaka’s’ or Tatsue’s gazes were able to return Mitsuki to her former appearance.

Exhibiting a rare display of genuine emotion, Mina screamed: “No! If Unpleasant Counter-Current, which represents innocence and justice, starts to hate other people – Ki-chan! Calm down! You are not one to deliberately emphasis hate! That’s the personality of the fallen angel, Unpleasant Counter-Current! According to the Bible,

the fate of a fallen angel is – “

She looked up at ‘Mitaka’ from within the bag and an expression of anguish surfaced on her face: “They will rebel, rebel, and be destroyed! In order to prove God’s justice and omnipotence, fallen angels are created to be evil, villains who will never find happiness!”

The car door easily broke and snapped.

“Die!”

The moment Mitsuki said this, Gankyū Eguriko was forcibly thrown out of the moving train. Looking out over the other passengers, who were either screaming or standing up to stare at Mitsuki –

Guriko’s body, which was thrown out, could be seen.

“Aha.” Mitsuki laughed shrilly.

“Ahaha. I killed, killed, kil…” Her body froze.

“Gulp –”

She collapsed on the spot. Mina screamed upon seeing this. Flustered, ‘Mitaka’ ran to Mitsuki’s side and embraced her, looking at her face, which was devoid of expression. The girl, still wearing the hat with round ears and looking as blank as if her soul left her body, looked up at ‘Mitaka’ with blank trust.

“Mi-chan…”

Then she looked at Tatsue, who was holding the bag and standing behind him, and stretched out her hand.

“Tatsu-chan, Sis. Run, run! I – want to vomit. Urgh, urk!” She pressed down on her stomach, and her face became pallid.

“Uuurrrrrrggghhhhh.”

She was careless.

Guriko was thinking calmly as she parted with the train.

Guriko wandered around the town for a long time after she decided

to trade with Tear Song, trying to gather five Lesser Fragments or one Greater Fragment. Guriko had the ability to sense monsters, Apple holders, and Mushi, even though she did not know the reason behind it.

The people she had finally discovered after a lengthy search was that group.

“But they seemed to be – the Snake? And Sterilization Disinfection?”

This group was a conglomeration of the people who fought to the death with her in the past – this made Guriko feel a nagging discomfort. *That guy was the Snake. Although its appearance was changed, I remember its smell.*

And there was Sterilization Disinfection.

“I thought I killed her.”

I believed what she said, and I thought she would die if I took away her heart. It was my fault that I didn’t give her a killing blow to ensure her death.

Sterilization Disinfection killed Rinne and my parents, even if I only spent a short amount of time with them.

She is an enemy whom I can never hate enough.

“Never mind. I will kill you no matter how many times it may need.”

Guriko muttered to herself. She was still flying in air as she kept thinking of a way to escape her current dilemma. If she were to hit the ground below the elevated tracks, she would likely suffer a severe injury and remain immobile for a while.

“If so –” She stared at the train gradually moving away and calculated her position, which was getting further and further from the train. Then, she locked her goal onto a residential building close to the train tracks, a building in her direction of travel.

“Mmmmm.”

She moaned as she forcibly changed her body position mid-air and aimed her feet towards the building. She yelled: “Ooooooooh!”

And stomped towards the wall of the building with all her strength.

The weak walls collapsed. Thanks to it, Guriko escaped the bonds of inertia and directed her flight path once again toward the train. Close to the last car of the rapidly-moving train, she barely managed to grasp onto a protruding part of the carriage. Fortunately, the speed of the train was manageable.

“Urk –”

Even so, she was almost blown away. She could only grit her teeth and endure the mighty G-force. Her muscles creaked pitifully and cold sweat poured down her cheeks.

The scenes around her flew backwards rapidly, and the world was completely black. There were residential blocks one after the another, and the wind from the train was loud enough to deafen her to everything else.

Suddenly –

The train began to shake vigorously.

“Urrrr?”

Her wrists felt like they were been cut by a knife, but Guriko managed to bear it. She maintained a position right up against the outer wall of the car and wanted to know what was happening.

She saw something incredible.

It was a pitch-black column of water.

The column of water easily pierced the ceiling of the car and sprayed high towards the sky. Like the splaying of blood, it broke through the walls and the ceiling and spluttered everything.

Perhaps this aggressive black liquid destroyed the wheels of the train.

“Bam” – there was a large and steady shift.

Then, immediately, the back half of the train swiftly left the tracks and tilted sideways, still carrying all its passengers on board.

The shaking and the noise, which felt like heaven and earth cracking open, quickly blew away “Mitaka’s” consciousness. This death-like darkness remained for a long time.

Will I die here, without a meaning, without leaving anything behind?

Death.

Only this overwhelming terror mercilessly hounded “Mitaka’s” consciousness as it floated in the darkness.

No, no, I don’t want to die.

“Mitaka” struggled and despaired. His unsteady consciousness sought the light of life.

“Mi… taka…”

I don’t want to die.

I want to live. But why? “Mitaka” always returned to this question at the end. Why did he fear death? Why did he wish for eternal life?

Gankyū Eguriko stood up and fought against the giant Dream-World Beast without fearing death half a year ago. She then distributed her own Apples without hesitation to strangers whom she had only recently met.

Why?

How could she do such a terrifying thing?

I laughed at her then. I really felt she was very foolish, stupid even.

However, that girl, who ignored the fear of death and decided to discard her eternal life without hesitation – was very strong. She was far stronger than “Mitaka”, who did not even know what he should live for and only wished to escape death.

Had Gankyū Eguriko found it?

Something more important than everlasting life. Something worthy of discarding this amazing life for.

What –

Is the point of life? What is its purpose? I don’t understand.

“Mitaka!”

Tatsue’s anguished sound woke up “Takamikado Mitaka’s” consciousness.

The first thing he saw was dust and smoke wafting towards the sky. Then there was the train that left the tracks and fell sideways, and the metropolitan railway officers who gathered to take care of the train. There was also a group of onlookers all yelling to each other as they gawked at this scene.

There was a siren that indicated emergency. There was the loud, beast-like noise of many people talking. There was the sound coming through the loudspeakers from the railway staff who tried their best to tell people “It is dangerous here. Please do not approach!”

Tatsue’s weak voice squeezed through in the narrow gap between this cacophony.

“Mitaka! Thank goodness!”

“Tatsue.”

“Mitaka” looked toward the direction her sound was coming from – Tatsue was looking down at him, who was lying on the ground. But he couldn’t find a word to say to her.

There was a startling red.

Tatsue was sitting on the ground, and blood dripped along her right arm. Her resplendent dress was all ripped and torn. Her arm was a ghastly mess of blood and bone, and was hanging down weakly by her side.

“Ki-chan… threw us out of the toppling train.”

Her voice was very weak and soft, so quiet as if it was about to disappear.

“I tried my best to use Dragon’s Breath to make a cushion out of air – hehehe, isn’t it awesome? I too am –”

“Tatsue, Tatsue!”

“Mitaka” felt a stab of pain in his heart. The reason he was still alive after being thrown out of a speedy tram must be Tatsue. *It was likely that she got her injuries from trying to protect me without regard to herself.*

Why?

Why – why would you do this for for someone like me –

“Tatsue.”

“Mitaka” endured the wave of tiredness that emanated throughout his body like a fainting spell and stretched his hand towards Tatsue, who was forcing out a smile. Her eyes were full of tears as she shivered in pain.

“Why – for me, me.” He pressed his hand over his chest and lowered his head.

“I will say this as many times as I need: I’m not the Takamikado Mitaka you know. Not only that – I am –”

A monster that ate Takamikado Mitaka and took his body and mind.

“I’ve always…”

For some reason, Tatsue said with a tiny voice as she smiled: “I really want to put my head on your knees… Just act spoiled and put my head cutely on your knees. I was kidding when I said I want to sleep; I just wanted to lie on your knees.”

What?

“Mitaka’s” expression changed. He thought Tatsue was asleep in the tram, but was she actually conscious?

Then she heard the conversation between Mina and me? She also knew my true identity as a monster –

Finally, Tatsue was incapable of maintaining a smile. She said as tears fell down her face: “I don’t know who you are.”

Her tears dropped one drop after another, dripping past her face, soaking into the parched earth.

“But no matter who you are, even if you’re not Mitaka, for some reason… I just feel you’re very important to me, and I like you. I am Kuroki Tatsue, a girl who is hopelessly in love with you.”

Perhaps the pain muddled her mind. She spoke with a dream-like expression.

“I’m all alone in the world. Two lonely people licking each other’s wounds sounds silly and naïve – but we are very good together, Mitaka. I want to keep acting spoiled around you. I want to stay with you and support you.”

Tatsue’s shoulder slipped and her head dropped, falling towards “Mitaka”.

“Tatsue –”

“Mitaka” hurriedly sat up and supported her. Her body was icy cold, perhaps from having lost too much blood.

Tatsue smiled and said evenly: “However – it seems this is the end of the road for me.”

She then hugged “Mitaka” weakly.

“Hey, Mitaka. You’ve always been looking for eternal life, and I’ve always strove to become the master of the world. Why? Do you know why do we do this and what is our goal? Do you know the answer of this question, which has tormented us? I – already understood.” Tatsue buried her head into “Mitaka’s” chest and murmured.

Her voice was calm and adamant.

“The answer – must be this, this warmth.”

Tatsue no longer moved after she said those final words.

Her fingers hung soft and limply downward. He kept calling her name, but it was useless. Tatsue did not open her eyes.

“Mitaka” showed an agonized expression.

“Don’t worry. She’s only fainted.”

There was suddenly a clear sound.

He looked up to see Mina's head lying in the gap between some trees.

It seemed Mitsuki tossed her out of the tram too.

The place where "Mitaka" and company crashed seemed to be the pedestrian walk along the train track. A dirty stream flew slowly alongside, and dense vegetation grew everywhere.

"Mina –"

"Mitaka" called out softly and let Tatsue down to the ground. He ran up to Mina and picked up her head. With a lost expression, she stared at "Mitaka".

"Honestly, just being a head is so inconvenient. I can't even move on my own."

Ignoring her complaints, "Mitaka" walked back to where Tatsue was: "But – Mina, is Tatsue really okay?"

"Mmm, she's okay. I once said Tatsue-san's body is that of a normal human, right? Allow me to correct that – although I can't prove it, her body is extremely similar to that of someone in possession of a Greater Fragment – someone who already has a Fragment taking root in her soul." Mina said evenly.

"The owners of Fragments have an organ, a 'sensory organ' used to keep the Fragment. Most times that would be the heart. However, if the heart becomes full, a situation like mine can arise where a person would construct a temporary sensory organ in the head."

So that was the reason why Mina was capable of living only as a head.

"Mitaka" guessed Mina stored her Fragments separately in her heart and head while she still had a human form.

She was then beheaded. Although separate from the Fragment in her heart, her consciousness survived because of the Fragment in her head – that was perhaps what she meant.

"Normally, the sensory organ inside an ordinary human would

become full with just one Lesser Fragment. If the person attempted to store more than one Fragment, the sensory organ would rupture and the person would die."

I didn't know about that.

"Mitaka" suddenly thought of a question. *A normal human would only be able to have one Lesser Fragment – that would be one Apple, right? If this is the rule, then what about me or –*

Gankyū Eguriko?

"Someone possessed by a Greater Fragment would have his body changed by the power of the Greater Fragment, and various negative effects such as altered personality would be apparent. However, the owner of a Greater Fragment can literally store as many Fragments as possible. Tatsue-san's body – seems to have a giant sensory organ only fitting of someone who has a Greater Fragment."

Mina looked incredulously at "Mitaka", whose face was full of doubt, and continued evenly: "Tatsue-san ate Ki-chan's flesh, correct? She ate a dense crystallization of energy – the 'soul'. That 'soul' should be thoroughly absorbed by Tatsue-san's large sensory organ, greatly increasing her strength and vitality. Therefore, she will not die. Normally, it takes a very long time for a big soul to completely fuse with the flesh. However, she already possesses a large sensory organ, and should be able to exert the power of a large soul immediately. She must have fainted because – she couldn't take such unaccustomed levels of pain." Mina murmured, as if speaking to herself.

"If she continues to absorb 'souls', Fragments, then she would become an existence equivalent to the Seven keepers of the Greater Fragments. Would this have anything to do with – Gankyū Eguriko?"

"Are you looking for me?"

All of a sudden.

The innocent and emotionless voice of a girl sounded.

"Mitaka" quickly turned his head and Mina also opened her eyes wide in shock. This girl should have disappeared in the darkness after Mitsuki threw her out of the car – she had a unique wolf-like

haircut, dressed in male clothing, and held a sparkling silver spoon in her left hand.

The mysterious girl – Gankyū Eguriko – was not wounded, and was walking calmly towards them.

“The tram –”

“Mitaka” surveyed his surroundings. Mitsuki was left in the overturned tram. Tatsue had fainted. Mina only consisted of a head. He was the only one who could act.

– Do I, someone with the body of a mere human, have to fight with her, who has such a terrifying attack power?

“I was a little startled with how it suddenly tilted. Thanks to the poles and rooftops nearby, which I used to step on and remove the inertia, I got no injuries.” With a cold expression on her face, Guriko said these inhuman words matter-of-factly.

“That weird hunger demon doesn’t seem to be here. Now you understand you won’t beat me, right? If you don’t resist, then I will at least spare you of any pain when I take away your Apples.”

“Mitaka” was scared of this girl from the bottom of his heart, this girl who pronounced his death in a low and emotionless voice like the Reaper himself.

He remembered what happened half a year ago.

The unforgettable terror he felt at that time now easily controlled his body. Run away. He wanted to run away. He must run away.

She is merciless. She will ruthlessly and completely destroy her enemies.

Even though his legs shook and he already felt defeated, “Mitaka” still quickly moved his body and spread his arms as if protecting Tatsue.

He held Mina in his right hand. His left hand, which didn’t even hold a weapon, was stretch meaninglessly into empty space.

“What are you doing?” Guriko smiled gloomily. “Hey, are you really that cruel Snake? What kind of a joke is this? You once despised humans, but now you want to protect her?”

“Shut up –”

“Mitaka” screamed with abandon: “shut up, shut up, shut up!”

His reptilian eyes sparkled with light and he smiled, as if overcoming his fear.

“Hahaha! Certainly, Gankyū Eguriko. I know you’re more than just a cruel monster. You can’t bring yourself to kill me as long as I pretend to protect humans like this, right?”

Guriko stared at “Mitaka”, and moaned: “Are you – really the Snake I knew?”

She held her spoon and walked slowly towards “Mitaka”.

“You are talking like this to incite me and challenge me. You claim the girl lying there is a victim, and you want to protect her because you actually think she is important to you? You’re deliberately doing this so I won’t kill her –”

“Hahaha, this is excellent!”

Stiffly, “Mitaka” bent his back and laughed loudly: “You’re so stupid! So naïve, so good! You think I would be so kind? If you’ve forgotten that, then I’ll let you remember – I am Snake! I am the descent of snakes, a clan that ranks first in the world in persistence – the clan that originally tricked humans and betrayed God in order to obtain immortality!”

He stared at Guriko, and tried his best to keep bluffing.

But Guriko did not move. For some reason, she had a sad expression to her face.

“Stop this!”

She pointed her spoon towards him and said in a threatening manner: “Stop it. Stop it! Shut up! A monster shouldn’t be talking! Stop talking like a human! I have to collect Apples. I have to end you all – end all your lives – with no mercy.”

As if talking to herself, Gankyū Eguriko yelled into the emptiness.

“I will return to being a monster! I have decided! I’ve decided! But – but – damn!”

She rushed towards him with all her strength. Then, she swiftly moved her left hand and made a stab towards ‘Mitaka’s’ eyes.

“How’s this? You’ll die! Aren’t you afraid of death? Isn’t that how Snakes are? Dodge! Run! Prove to me you are the Snake! Tell me you’re a creature that won’t protect humans! Then I’d be able to kill you without hesitation…”

“Mitaka” maintained his position, his arms spread out wide, preparing for Guriko’s strike. If he moved, Tatsue would be placed right in front of the spoon.

Tatsue –

Always tried her best, but never received anything in return.

She always tried to differentiate herself from others using her aristocratic language and splendid dress, trying so hard to maintain her final bit of pride.

She cannot die here –

She cannot die here in such a tragic and undignified way.

The real Takamikado Mitaka has been telling me as hard as he could to run away and leave Tatsue behind. Though he loves Tatsue, he loves his own life even more.

But I want to protect her. I want to preserve her smile.

Therefore –

“A monster like you…”

“Mitaka” blocked the spoon with his left hand and screamed as his hand spurted out blood: “I’m not afraid of a monster like you! I am not afraid of something like death!”

He stared at Guriko, who was getting apprehensive, and punched at her with his mutilated left hand: “Hahaha! You’re too weak! Gankyū Eguriko – you’re too weak! I’m not afraid of a monster like you! You won’t kill me! I promised Tatsue I’d see the doll she’d make – I will praise her, and I will make her smile!”

“Urk –” Perhaps frightened by this sudden retaliation, Guriko took a few steps back and widened her eyes.

“So loud, shut up! Be silent – Aaaaah! I need Apples to turn Rinne back to normal! Step aside, Snake!”

The two of them faced each other and refused to compromise, each having the complete opposite standpoint compared to half a year ago. They could not be stopped now. They would not stop until one dies or loses something important to them.

That was what they thought.

“Whoosh –”

Suddenly.

Something like a bullet flew towards them with a sharp yell. A powerful kick landed squarely on Guriko. Unable to take the incredible speed and power, Guriko flew backwards and rolled on the sidewalk, only stopping when she hit a big tree.

“Mitsu –”

Unable to hide his surprise, ‘Mitaka’ yelled out the name of the loud intruder: “Mitsuki?”

“A pleasure to meet you. I am the Angel of Miracles! I am the dancing and singing Excretory Organ!”

She was covered in blood –

“I am the invincible Unpleasant Counter-Current, Saibara Mitsuki.” She was covered in blood. Her flesh was broken and smashed, and her bones pierced her skin, visible to the outside.

Her internal organs were showing through the broken tissues. Her foot was fractured and twisted. It was incredible that she could still stand.

“Tatsu-chan. Mi-chan. Sis.”

Saibara Mitsuki smiled innocently, made a ‘chirp’ sound, and gave them a thumb up.

“I’m here now, so you can rest assured.”

“Ah –”

Mina, who was in 'Mitaka's' hand, screamed in a rare display of emotion: "Aaaaaah, aaaaaah! No, Ki-chan!"

"Mitsuki –"

"Mitaka" walked towards Mitsuki, who was smashed beyond recognition and grotesque to behold. A pained expression showed on his face. She threw them out of the car and let them escape even though she was trapped in the derailed tram, and now she was in such a pitiable state.

"Drip drop", her blood dripped to the ground and dyed the gloomy sidewalk black.

"Mitsuki, why?"

"Mitaka" couldn't understand this. He asked: "Why are you doing this even though you're –"

"Aha!" Mitsuki laughed cheerfully and pointed her large glove towards Guriko, who was pulling herself back up: "Mi-chan and Tatsu-chan are both my friends, so I will work hard to protect them."

Smiling with her smashed face, she added quietly: "I still have some of my memories from when I was still human. Back then, Saibara Mitsuki didn't have any friends. She liked her big sister, but still called her a degenerate, and didn't pay attention to her –"

She looked down with a heavy expression: "It was very lonely. That was all I remember."

Then she puffed out her chest, put her hands on her hips, and made an innocent pose.

"Therefore, hya! Mitsuki is the strongest when she has friends, when she's happy and has the power of friendship. Oooh, I don't think I'll lose to anyone. Although I failed back there – I won't lose myself and become the fallen angel again this time. I will be VERY ACTIVE in my original form!"

He knew she was bluffing. "Mitaka" felt someone had gouged out his heart. She called him a friend, but he had not given her much thought. He more or less regarded her as an unknown enemy currently working with them under duress, and had always been guarded towards her.

However, such doubts swiftly vanished.

I can't bear having this angelic innocent girl getting harmed. Mitsuki, Tatsue, and Mina are all my friends – yes, the first friends that 'I' ever made.

"Mi-chan!"

In front of Guriko, whose eyes were ablaze with anger and walking towards them as she estimated the distance, Mitsuki suddenly called out to him. Confused, "Mitaka" wondered what it was about.

He soon realized Mitsuki's intention. Flabbergasted, he frowned and changed his expression, and lifted his hand a little.

"Mitsu-chan."

"Clap," Mitsuki and "Mitaka" clapped their hands together.

With a smile, Mitsuki said in her usual innocence: "We're the strongest."

They faced Guriko. Guriko was no longer hesitating. Her barrel-like eyes locked onto them and she launched her attack. Unlike her previous indecision, this time her speed was so fast they could not even see her.

"Mitsuki!"

"Mitaka" couldn't help but yell. Mitsuki also seemed incapable of responding to such a quick movement, and stood where she was.

"You – dared to treat me like that!"

Guriko mumbled as her left hand, holding a spoon, stabbed towards Mitsuki's abdomen. Could it be that she wanted to put her hand into Mitsuki's wounded abdomen, where her organs were peeking through, and dig out her heart that way?

"Die –"

As she said this ruthless word, her left hand was sucked in by Mitsuki's abdomen.

"How – unfortunate –"

Mitsuki's abdomen's suddenly split into a giant mouth. That

ominous mouth, with rows of sharp teeth, was happily making the sounds of grinding teeth.

“Caught you!”

As Mitsuki said this, the arm that Guriko reached into Mitsuki’s abdomen was caught in a strong bite.

“Uuurgh?” Guriko twisted her body and tried to escape, but the powerful fangs didn’t allow that. Mitsuki smiled evilly and declared with an expression of victory: “I’m going to eat up now.”

“Crunch crunch crunch, grind grind grind.”

“Pop, slush.”

“Uwaaaaaaaaaaah!”

Guriko roared.

Being eaten alive by countless teeth would be unendurable. Just imagining it was terrifying.

The pain alone would be enough to kill an ordinary person.

Her skin was torn open, her bones smashed, flesh swallowed.

Guriko’s hand was gradually eaten by the gnarling mouth in Mitsuki’s abdomen.

Although her blood spluttered and dirtied her face, Guriko’s expression gradually became cold.

Briefly, Mitsuki frowned with confusion, but the mouth in her abdomen continued to move.

“I have lived for a thousand years – so long that I have lost the sense of pain.” Calmly, Guriko muttered to herself, her mouth open.

“My left hand, which had assisted me all this time… I’ll bid you temporary goodbye.”

Then she put her teeth to her upper arm without hesitation and decisively chewed off her own left hand. Her mouth full of blood, she smiled at Mitsuki, who was stunned.

“What are you surprised at? Why are you scared? Wouldn’t something like an arm grow back?”

Having lost both her arms, she had a courageous expression and kicked toward Mitsuki’s jaw.

“I’m not done yet!”

Then she gave Mitsuki another fierce frontal kick, and ran towards Mitsuki’s fallen body and kicked her again and again. Mitsuki’s bones broke, and her flesh split. Mitsuki’s struggling screams echoed throughout the dark sidewalk.

“Mitsuki!”

“Mitaka” hurried forward, wanting to help Mitsuki, but Guriko did not hesitate. She viciously kicked out at “Mitaka’s” face. He fell on the ground, groaning.

“Urggggg – ahhh, woah, uhhh.”

A faint shade of crimson appeared in Guriko’s eyes. Standing on top of Mitsuki, who could no longer resist and only struggled painfully, she said: “come, give me your Apple!”

Guriko’s body was blown away in the next instant.

“What?”

There was nothing. No light, no sound, and no impact. There was only a gentle wind brushing against “Mitaka’s” face, who was lying on the ground.

“Mitaka” realized someone was standing near him.

Forcibly repressing the pain, he scanned his surroundings and discerned the figure.

It was a silver anthropomorphic monster that looked like a blade. *I’ve seen it before. That was the existence that butchered Mitaka and ate “me” up.*

A handsome man stood next to it.

A perfect and elegant figure, wearing an excessively clean and

expensive suit without wrinkles or stains, all his hair brushed back, his gaze sharp and piercing, and his face wearing a faint smile - who was this man?

Guriko, blown away, lay lifeless on the ground. Did she faint? Did they manage to finish Guriko off with just one blow? How did they manage that?

Did that man do it?

“Giggle giggle…”

The man did not change his expression but only smiled lightly. Incredulously, the man did not open his mouth, yet his voice smoothly wove into sentences.

“Target A – Gankyū Eguriko, eliminated. Berobōchō, go finish off Target B – Unpleasant Counter-Current.”

“Clank, screech.”

There was a sound of knives scraping against each other. The silver monster named Berobōchō started to gallop. Mitsuki, covered with wounds, wobbled as she stood up and opened the mouth in her abdomen, waiting for her enemy to arrive.

“You do make it sound easy, finishing me off! I was busy eating Gankyū’s arm, so I couldn’t block those kicks before –”

“Grind grind”, the mouth ground its teeth.

“However, all attacks are annihilated when I haven’t eaten anything! I will take in everything you give, make it a counter current, and defeat you!”

Therefore – she planned to use that incredible glove, which once held Tatsue’s Dragon’s Breath and grasped Guriko’s spoon, to block Berobōchō’s slash.

However.

“Eeee – shaaaaaa!”

Berobōchō roared. His outstretched right hand –

Easily pierced Mitsuki’s glove and went through her wrist.

“Huh?” A deep and heavy vertical slash split Mitsuki’s body in half.

Blood splayed.

“Mitsuki?”

“Mitaka” called to Mitsuki, who was slowly falling to the ground. But there was no point. She sank into a pool of blood.

“According to the Bible –”

The man smiled with satisfaction and walked towards “Mitaka”. “Mitaka” wanted to get up and fight, but the wound Guriko gave him was worse than he thought, and he could not move.

“– angels never punished animals.”

The man smiled and continued talking in an explanatory tone: “The ‘role’ of the angel, of Unpleasant Counter-Current, is simply to decide a human’s sin and reciprocate it. She cannot punish an animal, which has no sense of evil. Ahaha, I’m so happy, so very glad! It was the right thing to listen to The Weakest and burrow Berobōchō. This guy –”

He looked at the silver monster that was jumping with joy and making a sound of blades scraping together.

“– has no evil intention. He is only instinctively killing others. I didn’t know if he was this kind of creature from the start, or if he was modified into this from by The Weakest. Hehe. It seems the ultimate weapon made to handle Unpleasant Counter-Current did its job. Target B – Unpleasant Counter-Current, eliminated.”

Then, with an expression as if he was going to lick his lips, he looked at “Mitaka” and Tatsue and Mina lying on the ground, and smiled.

“Ohhh, there are other treasures here apart from Gankyū Eguriko and Unpleasant Counter-Current, no? Looks like God truly blesses me. I even managed to find the head of Sterilization Disinfection, which The Weakest has been looking for – hmm? You are…”

The old voice stopped here. The man’s eyes stopped on Tatsue – and laughed for the first time since they saw him.

“Ha.”

His expression became really joyous, as if he was truly happy.

Spreading his arms, he spoke with his original voice: “I’ve advised you over and over again to be careful about making friends. Tatsue, you are different from Guryū. You really make me worry. But a kid who doesn’t need her parents to worry isn’t cute, after all.

Bending down, he took Tatsue into his arms: “It’s the first time we’ve met like this. Tatsue – I am your mighty father.”

“You, you actually are –”

“Mitaka” couldn’t help but burst out.

Tatsue’s father? Could… could it be?

He knew this man’s identity from the memories of Takamikado Mitaka, the child of the servants of the Kuroki family.

No one had ever seen the true likeness of Tatsue’s father. He was the head of the super conglomerate that controlled the entire world.

“The current CEO of the Sakaki Organization – Sakaki Ganhō?”

“Mitaka” yelled out this name. The other man immediately shook his head.

“That’s not the right title. I’ve cooperated with that devil, Tear Song before, and did things worthy of the Messiah under the table.”

“I am not a devil. I’ve also forbidden you from speaking out of turn, correct?”

Ganhō smiled at the voice of the old man, which really seemed came out of his own mouth. Then, with no expression on his face, he stomped his feet towards “Mitaka’s” head as if squashing an insect. The impact and the pain made “Mitaka” dizzy. His head was all fuddled. Unable to comprehend anything, he screamed: “What? What is this? What is this, just what –?”

He stretched his hand towards Tatsue, who was in Ganhō’s arms. However, as Ganhō pressed his feet down even harder, “Mitaka’s” consciousness soon disappeared.

Night 4: Temporary halt?

The Meat Doll was very happy.

She didn't know how others would judge her, but she was very happy.

"Aaaa - uaaaa, aaaa!"

The Meat Doll emitted meaningless whimpers and opened her mouth.

If she did that, then the handsome blond man sitting opposite her would gently place the spoon between her lips.

It was afternoon.

"Sensei" was feeding the Meat Doll his homemade hot soup, since she could eat on her own. The Meat Doll smiled because of the good taste, and spoke unconsciously: "Yummy."

These words didn't have any meaning.

The Meat Doll could even understand language. Her tongue only instinctively pronounced the words she thought of.

Even so, Sensei still smiles at me.

The Meat Doll could not even detect the unmistakable sorrow mixed into that smile.

Her favorite Sensei cooked for her, fed her, and most importantly, stayed beside her. This made the Meat Doll very happy and contented. She hoped this could last forever.

The 'self' of the Meat Doll, which was more ambiguous than that of humans, was willingly enduring this happy 'temporary halt' in a way.

"Milady, you shouldn't talk when you're eating." A fake smile was

barely staying on Sensei's face as he wiped away the drool and soup coming out the corner of the Meat Doll's mouth with a handkerchief.

She let him do this, feeling happy and content under his touch and his care.

"Aaaaum - "

"Sensei", with his tired face and black rings around his eyes, looked at the Meat Doll's reaction painfully.

He had stayed beside the Meat Doll for a few months now, taking care of Rinne, who was completely altered. There was no point in doing this.

A completely collapsed personality would never revert to its initial form.

"Sensei"'s shoulders drooped and his head fell, but he still grasped the spoon as if doing so would grant him atonement for his sins. He had failed to protect the Meat Doll, and therefore must be punished.

Yes.

He said he loved me.

He said he would protect me.

But I am all broken.

Therefore, Sensei, don't leave me ever again. Stay with me for your whole life. Don't look away even for a second. Only think of me. Only love me.

"Milady, here, open your mouth."

"Aaaa - "

The Meat Doll ate the food he cooked and smiled radiantly.

This time belonged only to the two of them. No one would disturb them.

Yes, indeed, this was so-called happiness.

The Meat Doll was very happy.

Although some thing seemed to be wrong, she was still very happy.

They ran out of food one day, and “Sensei” left to buy groceries from the town. He told her never to leave the room, so the Meat Doll laid down on the tatamis.

The cracks on the tatami mats felt prickly. The Meat Doll quietly enjoyed that sensation for a little while.

But she soon became bored, so she sat up and looked around the room.

An incongruously big television was placed in this small 4-tatami room.

There were many photos on the wall of Sensei with her joyous previous self, that girl called Usagawa Rinne.

They were at the amusement park, the aquarium, and at the beach. Sensei and herself looked very happy in each and every one of the photos.

She suddenly felt the corners of her eyes grow hot and her throat constrict. The Meat Doll couldn't help but let out a moan.

A warm liquid flowed down her cheeks - tears.

Why was she crying?

This temporarily halted paradise should be the best for the two of us. We will never leave each other. Sensei will do everything for me, and I will listen to everything Sensei tells me to do. No one else has the right to intrude upon our world, where there is only happiness -

We should be happy.

So why can't I stop crying?

"Uuuu, mmmmm, aaaaaa!"

The Meat Doll walked up to the wall and tore off the pictures on the wall. She couldn't bear it any longer. Her heart felt like it was going to burst open. Why?

She brusquely brushed off her tears and moaned.

"Uuuuummm - mmmmmmm."

A bottomless fear flitted past her eyes. Her mouth opened and closed meaninglessly.

"Aaaa –"

She then pronounced words that she had not spoken for a long time.

Is this 'my' happiness? Is this what I wanted? I believe so, because I am happy. Sensei loves me, is always with me, so I should be happy. There is nothing to be upset about. However, however -

I keep feeling there is something wrong.

Is this really the kind of happiness I was hoping for?

She suddenly heard a sound from outside the door. Someone was moaning and asking for help in a low voice, either from fear or pain.

That had nothing to do with her. She didn't need to care about it. Sensei said not to go outside. It was very scary outside. As long as she remained in this paradise, she wouldn't get hurt or broken again. She could happily stay with Sensei -

"I…"

The Meat Doll opened her eyes wide and crawled towards the exit.

"I - hate, I, am, not, such, a, despicable - person…"

As if asking for help, the Meat Doll once named Usagawa Rinne stretched her hand towards the door.

The Long-Armed Demon.

The serial killer who had murdered dozens of people a few months ago and plunged Kannonsakazaki into a spiral of terror was currently facing an extreme crisis. She wasn't been attacked by monsters, nor was she sick with a disease.

"Aaaa, aaaaauuuu, uuuuuummmm."

The Long-Armed Demon – Aizawa Ume – rubbed her head against the tatami as she wriggled in a strange manner.

"Idiot, idiot, why aren't you back yet, Kurukiyo! Sssssss, uuuuu, he must have forgotten about me… You tied the collar leash so tightly

on the stick so I can't move, and you haven't been back for three or four days! Die, die, die! If you died, then I'll hate you, curse you, haunt you. Kurukiyo you bastard…"

Ume looked very ordinary – apart from her two absent arms. Her short hair was tied up into two ponytails, and she wore a cute outfit befitting her young age. However, Ume did not attend elementary school despite being only eleven years old. Instead, she was imprisoned by a perverted detective.

Nageki Kurukiyo, the strange detective in question, had caught Ume in the incident a few months back. Ume had lost the ability to kill using her invisible arms, and he restricted her activities by imprisoning her in this old and decrepit apartment. Having lost her ability, Ume could not resist, and she was collared and couldn't move. But –

"Aaah, haaah, can't, can't handle it anymore. Uwah, someone – someone come help me, aaaa."

Since she can't move, she was unable to eat. Of course – she couldn't go to the restroom either.

Ume's bladder had reached its limit since Nageki was back last. She had endured long enough. She endured it the best she could and waited for Nageki to return as if she was waiting for an angel to save her.

But it was too much.

Ume's thighs were stiff and tears streamed down her cheeks like waterfalls. She screamed: "God! Buddha! I won't do anything bad anymore! Help me – forgive me! Why? Why do I have such bad luck? Dad, Mom, Zekiguchi, Kurukiyo! Someone, help me, help me!!!"

Click. Someone opened the door.

Ume thought she must be hallucinating as her sanity went over the edge. Someone couldn't have possibly opened the door at such an opportune time.

The sun outside of the door shone into the room, so she couldn't see her visitor's face. The only thing she could be sure of was that the

person was not Nageki, but a short young girl.

She felt as if she had seen this girl somewhere before, but she was too busy to think about that right now.

Ume displayed the most brilliant smile she had ever had in her life and called out to the other girl, who was looking silently into the room: “Ah – I, I’m saved! You! You, standing over there! Help me remove the collar!”

“Coll…ar?” As if saying a word she had never heard before, the girl replied with an incredulous tone. She then walked towards Ume and stared unblinkingly at her.

Ume kicked her legs in desperation and yelled at her anxiously: “Hey, what is this? What are you doing? Don’t you understand? This. Untie this thing! I can repay you however you like after you untie this thing! Hurry hurry! Hurry up, I can’t hold on anymore!”

The girl looked at Ume with a confused expression. Ume, in turn, was desperately stretching her neck to show her the collar. Luckily it seemed the girl understood, stretching her hands towards it. The knot was quite loose as Nageki knew Ume won’t be able to untie it anyways, so it came apart very easily in the girl’s hands.

“Thank you!” Ume yelled as she charged towards the restroom like a lightning bolt. *I don’t know who she is, but she was such a big help. Thank you, God! Thank you, Buddha!*

“Thank…you.” The girl repeated, as if considering Ume’s words.

She then smiled beautifully like a blossoming flower, but Ume could not see her sweet smile from where she was.

Whimpers.

A sound one would make when enduring unbearable pain, and also the sound of immense hatred.

Takamikado Mitaka slowly opened his eyes to see a dirty floor under him. He seemed to have fainted. He felt cold, and all his muscles felt weak. Mitaka tried to push himself up with his hands, but a piercing pain from his left hand made him collapse back down.

His left hand – if memory served, Gankyū Eguriko dug a hole in it. Right, so where was Gankyū Eguriko? Where was Tatsue? Mitsuki? Mina? Sakaki Ganhō?

“Urk…”

This is not the time to collapse, Mitaka thought.

He pushed himself up with his remaining hand.

This seemed to be a prison? It was dark. The stale air was full of the thick smell of blood. The iron bars before him reflected a dull light.

How long did I sleep for? Where am I? He tried to think, and was at a complete loss. The only thing he knew was that he had been pulled into the worst situation possible.

“Where am I? Damn it – Sakaki Ganhō! Show yourself! Why are you locking me in here? Where did you put everyone else?”

Mitaka kept shaking the iron bars. However, he could not break these bars with a merely human body and strength. As he tried and tried, the skin on his palms peeled off, so he stopped. Defeated, he sank into silence, feeling utterly empty inside.

“Ahh…”

He suddenly heard something.

“Mi-chan, are you there?” The voice was weak and soft, but he recognized that voice.

“Mitsuki? Where are you?” Her voice was echoing in this small place, but he couldn’t tell where it was coming from. Mitaka was planning to look through this darkness with his reptilian eyesight, but stopped when Mitsuki spoke with a troubled voice.

“No, it’s better if you don’t look.” He heard her coarse, dying voice.

Mitaka couldn’t help but shiver. He instinctively felt something bad was going on.

“It’s terrible, isn’t it, Mi-chan?” Even her laughter sounded weak: “They won’t treat my wounds because I have a Fragment – and just left me lying here. Um, I don’t quite look like a human anymore… hehe, so I don’t want you to see me.” It was that same innocent, half-joking tone.

“I was – examined? Dissected? – while Mi-chan was unconscious. Slicy slicy with the surgical blades, snapy snapy with the pincers. It was terrible… and Mi-chan, it was humans who did it, too.”

Mitaka was so surprised that he could only respond with a questioning gaze. Mitsuki gave out a low laugh: “It was humans. EVERYBODY in this institute is an ordinary human. They all want to live forever, want to be stronger, and want to retain their youth. Such weak and pitiable humans. I am absolutely terrified of them.”

Her voice was shaking, gradually losing its optimistic and angelic tone.

“They were ordinary humans. These men and women cut me up only because they were afraid of death. But it wasn’t only me, right? Because they want to keep living, because they don’t want to die – that was why humans tore open the earth, destroyed the environment, polluted the ocean, corrupted the air, made species extinct, and kept betraying their brethren – huh, that won’t do at all. They’ve never evolved after Noah’s time.”

“Mitsuki?”

It was pitch-black. He could not see Mitsuki’s expression.

It was no longer Mitaka’s friend, Saibara Mitsuki, lying in the darkness.

“Ahahahaha, this human race deserves to be annihilated, doesn’t it? If humans are only capable of continuing to hurt each other and making mistakes, then they are not needed. They should be destroyed. So scary. So much hate. I want to vomit. I want to vomit. I want to vomit. I want to vomit.”

Unpleasant Counter-Current, Saibara Mitsuki, calmly said: “Aah, malevolence – it’s coming.”

“Mitsuki?”

Mitaka shook the bars, yelling at Mitsuki, who he couldn’t even see.

“What’s wrong, Mitsuki?! What are you talking about?”

There was no reply.

What did those people do to Mitsuki? She said ‘institute’ – what kind of

place is that? He hated himself for falling unconscious. Mitaka didn't care about humans. Indeed, for his reptilian race, humans were arguably his most detestable enemies, having eaten the Apple and being chased out of the Garden of Eden.

But Tatsue was one of those humans.

There were probably also other humans who were trying their best to keep living.

It was wrong to destroy the human race just because one hated some humans.

This thought would never have crossed Mitaka's mind half a year ago, but now he genuinely believed it. No. Everything was going in a bad direction. He had to leave this place. He needed to calm down Mitsuki's malevolence, then save Tatsue and Mina from somewhere within this place, then –

He heard a click.

When he turned around – like a mirage, someone was suddenly standing in front of Mitaka, who was facing the bars.

"Joker. That's my name."

The person gave a name without being asked for it, and continued in a low voice: "that's my true name, but no one would believe it, so it became a nickname. It doesn't matter. I've already told you my name, and allowed you to see my face."

It was a beautiful foreigner who appeared to resemble someone Mitaka knew.

Her blonde hair reached her thighs, and bells were tied to her hair for some reason. She had blue eyes, her lips had red lipstick on, she was dressed in a black suit and black boots, and held a pair of sunglasses in her hand. She was a woman, but her speech and mannerism were very masculine – no, the impression of masculinity was imperfect.

"I doubted my luck the first time I saw you, but you really are the Snake. I am so lucky." She smiled as the bells in her hair rang.

“The coward had shown you her name and face. You better understand what this means and its value, and reply to my questions truthfully.”

Ignoring Mitaka, the woman called Joker murmured.

“The remnant of the house of Snakes, which has survived despicably till now – I ask of you, does God exist?”

She asked with an even but somewhat passionate tone. Mitaka couldn’t respond. This question, so childlike and simple, was very difficult. He frowned with confusion.

“Why –”

“Don’t ask why. Answer me!” Joker hysterically stomped her feet and approached Mitaka.

“Is there a God? Is there a Divine Will? Are Miracles real? Is there a Paradise?” As if asking for help, as if praying, pleading, needing, she asked this over and over.

“Hey! – Snake, did God really exist back in the distant past? Did your ancestors feel for even once that God really existed?”

Looking at Mitaka, who remained silent and turned his face away with some fear, Joker sighed.

“So you don’t know either.” She turned around, muttering to herself.

“Heh. Calmness, peace, Utopia – where are they? Scary, scary, scary scary, this world is so scary.”

“You –”

Mitaka shivered when he heard her twisted words: “Who are you? Sakaki Ganhō’s accomplice?”

“Ganhō…” She stopped, looking back at him: “he must be the greatest coward in the world. I believe he is trying his best to find a way to protect himself and remove himself from danger because of his cowardice, which is why I am helping him. This institute is the Second Babel that he had built, based on the information that I gave him.”

She stared at him as she said some rather incomprehensible things.

“I assist him, and sometimes lend him the name of Tear song, to let him perform the ‘role’ of the Savior. I am very scared of showing myself before other people… terrified of that even now. Just now, you heard the old voice that was different from Ganhō’s voice. That was my altered voice after I made myself invisible. I was also the one who attacked the space Gankyū Eguriko was in and made her faint.”

“You…”

Mitaka couldn’t understand this. He kept asking: “What are you? What are you?”

“I am Joker, just a coward. Others call me Tear song.” She smiled and merged into one with the darkness.

“Snake, your family was right. You don’t want to die, you want to live forever; what’s wrong with that wish? What’s wrong with praying for eternal peace?” Only her obsessive voice echoed in the narrow prison cell.

“God! If you exist, then love me! Elevate me, grant me peace, give me eternal life! I am prepared to sacrifice everything except me to achieve that goal!”

The woman with a ridiculous name disappeared as she kept shouting.

Mitaka felt like vomiting. He felt he had just glimpsed the kind of creature he himself was.

“Mi-chan.” He heard Saibara Mitsuki calling towards him: “Run away. The iron bars… are tough. Humans can’t break those, but you are the Snake, so you could get out. Run – away – quickly. Please… help Tatsu-chan and big sis. I, can’t, hold on.”

“Mitsuki – hey, please don’t!” He decided not to think too much and screamed into the darkness: “I hate owing favors to other people, but you helped me escape from Gankyū Eguriko, didn’t you? Hey, what now? Now I need to repay the favor. If I don’t save you, then I’d be worried about owing you a favor, and I won’t be able to sleep!”

“Hehe.” Mitsuki laughed in a disturbing manner.

“Mi-chan is so manly. I’d fall in love with you if Tatsu-chan wasn’t

already your lover."

"Don't be stupid. Come, Mitsuki, we're escaping! Mitsuki is the invincible Unpleasant Counter-Current, no? You always said that. Let's break these iron bars with a snap! Come!"

Mitaka yelled, but Mitsuki only laughed weakly.

"No… I feel like I'm going to disappear soon. It's all in my heart. The spite, hatred, and terror are all mixed up inside. I'm probably… going to disappear."

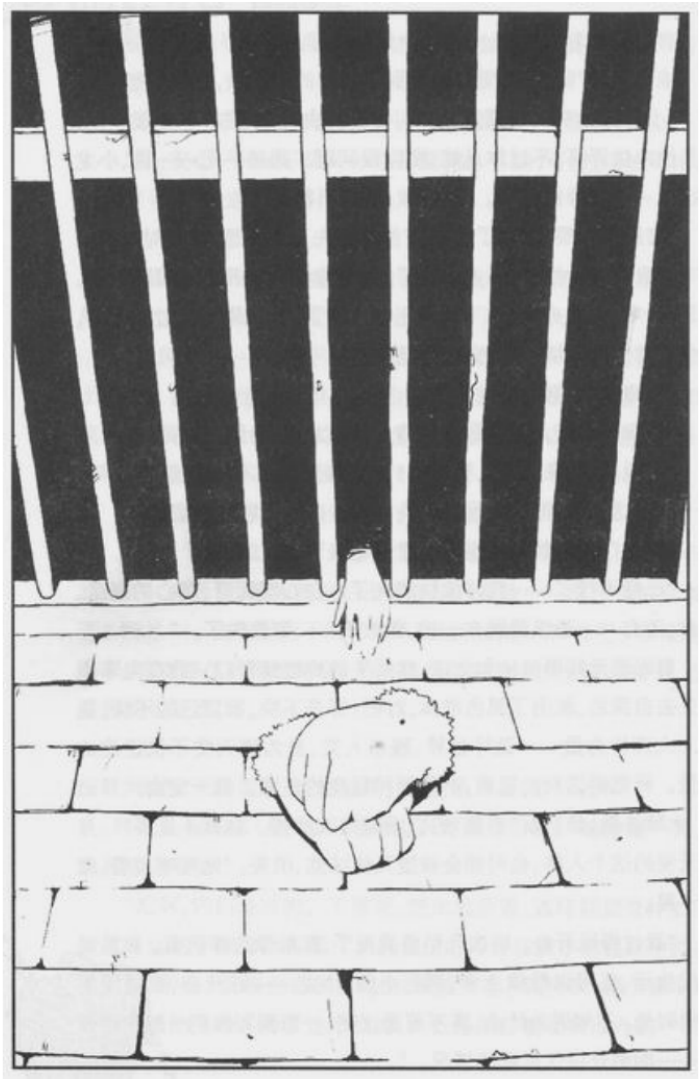
Mitsuki said this matter-of-factly, then continued calmly: "I let out some black liquid when I lost control in the tram, didn't I? That's malevolence, my own malevolence. That's the power of the Greater Fragment – the power of the fallen angel Unpleasant Counter-Current, which can destroy the world and eliminate humanity. I feel the malevolence I have this time isn't even on the same scale. I will definitely deal out destruction, slaughter people, and be finished off for my 'evil'. Even if that doesn't happen, my normal personality as an angel is likely to be wiped out by that of the fallen angel and disappear." She muttered with a smile.

"I am very happy. I should have died a few years ago, but I am still alive. I could live with big sis, I could go to school and meet Mi-chan and Tatsu-chan – I am so happy. That was a wonderful time. It is incredible. I feel happy when I think of the time spent with you – even though I'm in such a bad position."

Then, Mitsuki said firmly with her habitual innocence, as if it was the final chirp of a cicada: "I am very happy."

Then, she said quietly: "Mi-chan, run away. Run away while those happy memories of living with you are still suppressing my malevolence – hey, whether I am controlled by the fallen angel and lose my consciousness, or I die from exhaustion, we will probably… never meet again."

Just as Mitaka was considering what to say, a familiar pair of big gloves appeared between the bars. She was actually very close to him.



“So… don’t look at my body, hold my hand, hold it tight. Just for one last time. Just remember this touch. That would be enough for me not be afraid of disappearing. I like this world.”

Mitaka held Mitsuki’s hand. Her fingers twitched slightly: “And I love humans.”

Mitaka obeyed Mitsuki’s wishes and did not look at the red and black object lying in the darkness.

“I hate being like that. I don’t want to hate, I don’t want to destroy. More importantly… I don’t want to disappear. I don’t want to, I don’t want to disappear, I don’t want to die. I want to stay with

everybody. Mi-chan, Tatsu-chan, sis –”

She looked at Mitaka, and a solitary tear slid down her cheek.

This is despicable.

She had goose bumps everywhere. An unpleasant feeling crept up her throat with every breath. Kuroki Tatsue whimpered with a pallid countenance.

“Devil…”

Her hands were tied behind her, and she could not wipe away the burning tears flowing past her cheeks. Her sight was hazy, and even the figure of the handsome man standing before her – Sakaki Ganhō – was gradually distorted.

“Devil, Devil!” She yelled at the top of her lungs. Tatsue gasped from this unfamiliar roaring.

But that was not enough for her. Her brain continuously supplied her with repulsive phrases and hateful words. As she considered which one she would use to spit her bile at the man before her, Ganhō laughed loudly: “Hwahahaha! Devil? You’re calling me the Devil?”

Ganhō looked arrogantly at her with an oppressive gaze reserved for those who ruled over others, as if she was lower than the dirt itself.

“Tatsue, the Devil isn’t my ‘role’. My duty is to assist the Savior, Tear song. I am her disciple – an angel! Swear at me, call me an angel! Everything must be correct!”

This was an alien place.

They were in a circular room, and innumerable screens covered every inch of the walls. No, not just the walls, Even the floor and ceiling were also displaying images. Holograms? Special effects? Tatsue couldn’t help but think this when she first saw what was on display.

Strange monsters. Precise machinery. Broken corpses. Researchers

clad in white lab coats. These images on the small screens where like those Tatsue occasionally saw on the television, and she thought those were very life-like acts.

But –

“Waaaaaaa.”

Tatsue’s hands were tied behind her and she was sitting on the ground, and she cried while in that pose: “How, how could you be an angel… you’re even lower than a human. Why –”

She strained her voice and roared hoarsely: “Why – How can do you something so cruel?”

The most terrible image was being displayed in the biggest screen in front of Ganhō.

She was tied to the operating table with powerful wires and was under the gaze of a group of expressionless, white-clad men – Saibara Mitsuki was being dissected alive.

She was crying, screaming, calling out for Tatsue, Mina, and Mitaka.

But blades and pincers mercilessly kept tearing into her flesh. Even Mitsuki, who was capable of removing the feeling of pain, probably could not endure the sensation of her own body being toyed with like that – her eyes rolled back and she fainted.

But those men did not stop. They continued to dissect.

Blood. Blood. Blood.

“So that was what is behind Unpleasant Counter-Currents abilities. She reflects malevolence, but not without limits – looks like she must use those gloves to grab malevolence, then let the mouth in her stomach eat it. If she tries to revert malevolence in other ways, it would cause too much damage – is that so? This ability is quite inconvenient. How is that invincible… how dare she threatens me.”

Ganhō kept talking to himself as he looked at the image in front of him. The researchers in white lab coats were intensely discussing something around the operation table, which had but a few pieces

of Mitsuki's body left on it. Tatsue had almost gone mad from having seen Mitsuki being cut up. The unending tears made her voice thick with a nasal twang. She screamed at Ganhō: "Why –"

She tore off her fake mask and cried like a baby, without regarding her appearances.

"Why did you do that? Did Ki-chan ever do anything bad? What is this place? Please answer me – Father!"

"Don't fret like a little bird." Ganhō turned to look at Tatsue and smiled elegantly.

"This is the Eternity Institute."

Tatsue's anguished expression became mixed with confusion upon hearing that phrase.

"Eternity – Institute?"

"Hey, Tatsue, do you think humans are happy?" Ganhō asked with full seriousness.

The flickering images around him were portraying an abysmal scene. Someone died every few minutes, their spluttering blood dirtying the camera. Dying screams came out one after the other. Anguish, hatred, rage and horror gathered and condensed here. This was Hell.

"Hey, Tatsue, I am probably the richest human on earth."

"Clunk Clunk." The sound of leather boots stepping on the floor accompanied Ganhō's elegant gait as he paced in the room.

"If I – Sakaki Ganhō, CEO of the Sakaki Organization, the dominator of the world – so wished, then I could obtain all the happiness in the world. Gourmet food, a beautiful appearance, the mysteries of the world, all the wonders of nature. Entire countries, fame, even human lives – if I wanted them, then they would immediately be presented to me."

He suddenly stopped in front of Tatsue and put his face close to her: "But Tatsue – my wishes are never-ending."

“Aaaah.” He groaned and looked at the ceiling.

“Eternal life. This is what made the first Emperor of China, a man who possessed a vast empire and enjoyed all the happiness on earth, worry till his death. If you knew that I remain unsatisfied after eating the ‘Apple of Eden’ Tear song gave me and obtaining immortality, would you be surprised?”

Tatsue was silent. Sakaki Ganhō was her goal. She always swore that she would one day surpass her magnificent brother, inherit everything from Ganhō, and became the ruler of the world.

But I can no longer desire his position like I did before.

I already knew what true happiness is.

“Even if I obtain everything on earth, I would lose them all once my life ends. I am scared of that. Even with an Apple, I will die if my heart is removed from me. There is no absolute, perfect assurance. That is why I desire, why I crave eternity –”

Was that Sakaki Ganhō’s goal?

“What we investigate in this institute is the eternal happiness that I wish for, something the rest of the world undoubtedly also wishes for. Why can we not enjoy happiness unperturbed? Because of fear. What are we afraid of? We are afraid of the unknown. We do not know if there is a world after death, so we fear death. Omniscience – that is the road sign towards eternal happiness.”

Ganhō smiled and pointed to a monitor. A strange monster was giving out an ominous roar.

“Something like monsters.”

The image on the monitor changed. It was a crying human whose skin was pierced – the image continued to switch as if it was a rewinding tape.

“Something like Apple Holders.”

Ganhō opened his arms. Any residual reason in his eyes had completely disappeared. He shouted: “What is a Fragment? What are the Seven Kobitos? What are the reasons for monster activities? And at last – what is God?”

He put his hand over his heart and smiled like a gentleman.

“After I solve all these mysterious and understand the entire structure of the world, I will receive a perfect and immortal body and all the happiness in the world. Don’t you think that would be true satisfaction? That that would be the pinnacle of humanity?”

Tatsue couldn’t help but hide her face, looking at Ganhō’s roaring laugh.

That.

That –

That kind of a reason –

“That’s why you did those horrible things to Ki-chan –”

“Ki-chan? Oh, Saibara Mitsuki. Unpleasant Counter-Current, one of the Seven Kobitos. I was very much looking forward to her due to rumors of her invincibility, and I even dissected her. But there was not much to be learned. I plan to have her fight Gankyū Eguriko, whom I tried so hard to catch. That should reduce Unpleasant Counter-Current’s power.”

It was a very cold voice.

He didn’t know how Mitsuki laughed, how she happily talked about even the most meaningless things. He didn’t know Mitsuki’s happy expressions when she was eating delicious food, and her occasional gentle expression. That was why he could treat her like an object, completely insensitive to her pain and anguish.

He didn’t regard other humans as equals. His heart was so cold.

Tatsue felt her heart was rapidly approaching a kind of clarity. She shivered, her body shook, and her dry, tearless eyes looked at Ganhō as the latter kept talking.

“We also captured many monsters that swelled out due to Sterilization Disinfection’s absence. We tried to get humans to eat their body parts and did some dissections, along with many other types of experiments. There are no breakthroughs so far – but we don’t need to worry about running out of materials. If we show humans the evils done by monsters, we can abduct as many humans as we want, hehehe.”

So it was the Eternity Institute that was abducting humans.

This Institute must also have committed uncountable sins. She wouldn't be able to retain her mind if she knew all the truths hidden here.

"Tatsue, why are you looking so serious?" Ganhō looked towards Tatsue with a puzzled expression. "No matter how many ordinary humans die, it doesn't bother us, who rule. Rejoice, Tatsue. It was destiny for you to come into contact with Apples and the Kobitos. If I fall in the middle of accomplishing my goal, then you can inherit this institute. The public Sakaki Organization can be given to Guryū – Oh? Tatsue, shouldn't you be happy? This is a very good thing. Thanks to me, you will come to know about true happiness."

"Shut up, fool." Her voice was very low.

Tatsue growled this piercing sentence with an icy tone.

Ganhō's self-possessed expression froze in place, as if he couldn't believe what he heard. He asked with a shaking voice: "Tatsue, what did you say?"

Tatsue matched his frozen expression with hatred, glaring at him with an anger beyond words. Her voice was low, ominous, and too precise for perfect calm.

"I already know what true happiness is. I don't need other people to teach me."

There was a strong will in her unsteady gaze.

"Father… you were once a divine figure to me." She said calmly, closing her eyes.

"I idolized you. I did that because I had never met you, and I only knew you were the director of an organization mightier than countries, a power that controlled the world. I believed Father must not be as confused and troubled as I am. I believed you were a perfect being."

She opened her eyes. Her voice contained no irony or scorn, only pity. "But – looking at your face and listening to you talk disillusioned me. When I think of what kind of a person Father really was, I can only think you're a fool. A fool who could not even comprehend the meaning of happiness, which even a baby with

limited intelligence could understand!”

Ganhō’s expression became serious and he made a long step towards Tatsue.

He was terrifying.

Tatsue wasn’t brave. A tall man approaching her like this was enough to scare her to death. But she could not - would not - retreat now.

She gathered all the courage within her and indicted the head of the Sakaki Organization: “A fool like you will never obtain satisfaction and happiness. Even if you possess an immortal body, control the entire world, know all the rules that govern this earth, you will still be unsatisfied!”

Ganhō put his fingertip to his chin and stared at Tatsue silently.

Tatsue could not even move her limbs. Her entire body shook, but she did not look away, did not stop her words.

“Do you know why humans want eternal life and seek to possess more and more, even after they have gained the whole world? Do you know why humans struggle, hope, and pray to keep living?” Even if her teeth cluttered, her tongue became stiff, and it became difficult to speak, she refused to be silent. “It seems you do not know this. Let me tell you then, Father. We want to be loved. We are solely alive for that instant when we know we are loved, when we feel that happiness.”

Once upon a time, Tatsue wanted to dominate the world. She wanted to surpass her brother, she wanted to obtain the Sakaki Organization – but this illusory dream was not real.

Mitaka said he was always chasing after everlasting life, but he didn’t seem to know why he wanted immortality and why he was born.

Mitaka, the answer is simple.

Don’t worry.

The instant you embrace your beloved, the instant you speak to people you care about – humans are alive just for that one split second of happiness. Right then, even if it was just for one moment, you would be

satisfied – you would feel it is good to be alive.

Why did Tatsue want to dominate the world?

She didn't want anything. She didn't want to have power.

– Mom, praise me.

That innocent wish Tatsue pronounced in her childhood was the truth.

Tatsue wished to be praised by others, and wanted to be acknowledged.

Tatsue was simply someone who deeply wished for others to regard her as 'Tatsue'. She believed that could only be achieved by exceeding her brother, inheriting her father's role, and becoming the leader of the Sakaki Organization. She had to leave behind her identity as 'insurance' and obtain the Sakaki Organization according to her mother's wishes.

Only then could she be praised and acknowledged.

No. Only then could she be loved.

That was probably the final goal of humanity.

We labor to earn money and hope for an elevated position just so we can be praised by others, just so we can be loved. We pray for eternity only because we want more time to be loved.

Humans feel happy from the bottom of their hearts when they are loved.

That was what she thought.

That was why Tatsue declared: "You who do not love others, who do not respect others, and who carelessly murdered others because of your pointless research – a man as devoid of love as you will never be happy! You cannot feel others' love, cannot care for others, and will never be loved. You will never be satisfied!"

"Hey." Ganhō grabbed hold of Tatsue's face and growled. "I don't

know what you're talking about, but you – you should watch your tone, girl. I can't be happy? I, Sakaki Ganhō, the richest man on Earth, the man closest to God, the man with eternal life? How can a little girl like you understand anything like this… Tatsue, you should assess your own social position before you speak up. If you are obedient, then I've already promised you this wonderful institute! Don't elevate yourself above your position – there are plenty of people who can take your place!"

Even when scolded, Tatsue still shook her head and flung Ganhō's hand away.

"No –"

Incidentally, her eyes caught one image – it was a soft, slithering snake – and she smiled.

She knew about that familiar black skin. That was… that skin – trying not to let Ganhō notice, she continued talking as if trying to tell the black snake: "No one can substitute for me. I am who I am. I am Kuroki Tatsue, and I will exist as long as there is a person who acknowledges me as such!"

She glared at Ganhō and declared firmly: "I am ten times – no, hundreds of times happier than you! Envy me! You can keep painstakingly worrying about and misunderstanding happiness, my pitiable Father!"

"Little wench – do you want to be cut into pieces?!!" Ganhō's eyes widened as he roared. Tatsue was not scared. She was no longer shaking. Her arrogant gaze ardently followed the black snake that gradually disappeared out of the corner of the monitor.

At the same time, something was happening on the third floor of the apartment building that could have been mistaken as a big piece of junk had it been any smaller.

Someone thanked the Meat Doll. If each thanks counted as flowers, then the Meat Doll felt like she was placed into a flower garden.

"Thank you very much. You didn't save my life, but… you really helped me out. I will have to respect you from now on."

The girl without arms bowed energetically to the Meat Doll. She

was slightly shorter than the Meat Doll, and her cute whirls of hair could be seen as they sat face to face.

The Meat Doll stretched her hand towards the girl's slightly shaking ponytails and made "aaahhh" sounds with her mouth. The girl smiled and gave her name.

"My name is Aizawa Ume. I actually have a more scary name. Hmm, that's a secret. What's your name? Do you live here?"

Hearing the Meat Doll making throaty sounds, Aizawa Ume looked confused. She then proceeded to talk to herself.

"The people living here are really cold. I shouted so much for someone to come help me, and no one turned up. This is the sickness of the modern world and no one cares about anyone else…"

She continued, talking about something difficult that the Meat Doll couldn't understand. Or perhaps she couldn't think what should follow this information. The little girl shook her head and looked at the Meat Doll.

"Hmm, but this feels strange. I feel like I've seen you somewhere. Where could it have been? Is this the first time we met?"

"The first time."

The Meat Doll copied Ume's words without comprehension. Ume nodded in agreement.

"Hmm, it is indeed the first time we met. Hehe, I'm not very good with faces or names."

As she said this, she got up nimbly on her legs and walked anxiously towards the door. Using her body to turn the doorknob, she slowly opened the door and looked out.

Then she closed the door silently, as if being guarded against something. She went back into the room, collapsed on the ground, and said softly with a touch of loneliness in her voice: "Why isn't Kurukiyo back yet?"

"Kurukiyo?"

Seeing the Meat Doll was confused, Ume furrowed her brows and

said: “That perverted detective.”

“Perverted detective.”

Gradually, tears welled up in Ume’s eyes. She curled up like a little kid and lied down on the floor.

“He said he’d be back on the next day. Liar. Where has he been for the last three or four days? Did he get killed by a monster? A guy like that deserves to die.” She murmured and sobbed.

“Sob sob.”

She started to cry. Warm tears flew past her cheeks. Ume tilted her head in surprise.

“Huh? Uwaaaa, why am I crying… I’m acting like a fool, like a fool!”

“Ume-chan?” The Meat Doll blurred out those words and stretched out her hand.

Why? Her own personality was already shattered, but she still felt painful whenever she saw others shed tears.

She caressed Ume’s back, and Ume looked up at her awkwardly.

“Uwah, uuuwaahhh!” She cried in loneliness, as if she was just a lost child.

“Uwahh, uwaaaaahhhhh!”

The Meat Doll stared at her. Warm liquid was flowing down from her eyes, her throat was slightly shaking, and she cried pitifully.

The Meat Doll’s heart hurt… She couldn’t bear to keep looking at this.

“Don’t, cry.”

The Meat Doll mumbled softly. She couldn’t even understand the meaning of her words, but she kept saying: “Don’t cry.”

She patted Ume’s head.

She seemed to recall that she had seen Ume before when she was still Usagawa Rinne. Back then, she was asking for help – she had

an unstable, lonely expression.

Seeing Ume like this hurt the Meat Doll.

The Meat Doll comforted Ume as she took some time to contemplate.

Although it was something more primitive than human thought, something more instinctive, something that couldn't even be called 'thought'.

Why do I feel sad when I see other people crying or hurt?

Other people have nothing to do with me. No matter how hurt they are physically or mentally, that won't hurt me. It should have nothing to do with me.

But I feel hurt when I see her cry.

Her pain is my pain.

We are the same.

The Meat Doll felt confused when she reached this train of thought. *We – are – the –same.*

The door then opened.

"Kurukiyo?"

Ume responded like a little animal and lifted up her tear-streaked face. Before her eyes –

"Hihihi."

The door was opened.

A head of long black hair, tied into intricate patterns, moved slightly in the wind that blew in through the open door. Ume stared at that unnaturally tall man, who bent down to come through the door.

"Ah!"

She opened her mouth wide and her expression froze, as if she saw

a ghost in broad daylight.

The man had an almost holy aura, but his eyes were sharp and piercing like a wolf's. He smirked and looked towards Ume with an enigmatic expression, and clapped exaggeratedly.

"Oho, how strange. I'm getting a really cold reception. What should I do? What I should do? Is it really true that girls would forget their ex-boyfriends in one day?"

"Aaah – erm."

Ume's tears and moans have both stopped, and she lifted up her pale face to look at the man. "Zeki-kun."

"Mmmm. A pleasure to meet you. I am Zekiguchi Nashinori."

The words he spoke as he bent down in greeting could be interpreted to mean something unpleasant. He then turned nonchalantly: "Ah, right… I shouldn't forget this. This is a present, Ume-chan."

He was carrying someone over his shoulder. As he muttered these words, this man calling himself Zekiguchi elegantly put the person down on the tatami and shrugged casually.

"At least he's still alive."

"Kurukiyo?"

Ume screamed and ran towards the man who was put down on the floor. The man wore an old jacket. He was not as tall as Zekiguchi, and his long fringe covered up his face, making it impossible to distinguish his features. Ume called his name with emotion and sobbed.

As Zekiguchi had said, that man seemed to still be alive.

However, his entire body was covered with some black substance, which could either have been mud of blood. He had also fainted, and may well have been wounded.

Ume's face was pallid as if all the blood had been drawn away from her body. She looked at Zekiguchi, who was still giggling.

"Zeki-kun… Did Zeki-kun do this?"

“Oh?” Zekiguchi made a silly sound, then broke into a meaningless, roaring laughter. He shook his hand.

“Ahahaha, idiot, why should I go bully a human? It’s because of that thing, that institute Tearsong has running.”

Zekiguchi frowned as if trying to think of something, then he pronounced that name.

“What was it called – the Eternity Institute? I felt something was wrong over there, so I set up surveillance. Then this guy suddenly popped up, and had a very interesting conversation with Tearsong. I was looking on the sidelines, but he was getting into a very dangerous situation, so I ended up saving him.”

“Hihihi,” Zekiguchi laughed with an unnatural sound and looked down on the man on the floor.

“Then he started calling for your name, someone whom I haven’t been able to find and am very concerned with. I wanted to just leave him somewhere, but now I found him really interesting. I found out his address from his driver’s license, and I took him home. That’s how we ended up with this touching reunion, OK? Did you get that?”

Ume’s previously happy expression suddenly disappeared. Like a child who was afraid of being chided, she had an anguished expression on her face.

“Zeki-kun…”

She lowered her head and mumbled: “Um – uwah, my arms… no… uwah – they disappeared. It’s not how you think it is. A woman took them away. It’s not my fault.”

“Oh? Your arms disappeared? Really?”

Looking surprised, Zekiguchi lifted up one eyebrow and poked Ume’s forehead once.

It was a very natural movement. Did that mean anything in particular?

But Zekiguchi still looked unperturbed and maintained his smile: “Ah, so this is it? No problem. They didn’t disappear, didn’t disappear at all.”

“Huh?” This time it was Ume who was surprised. She opened and closed her mouth incessantly.

“Re – really? The Long-Armed Demon’s two arms are still here?”

“Yep. Hihihi, Sterilization Disinfection did this, didn’t she?”

Zekiguchi smiled and hugged himself, nodding continuously as if he understood something.

“I think it was because Sterilization Disinfection’s ability completely destroyed your ‘arms’, which were dense crystallizations of energy. Then the ‘soul’ within your sensory organ almost completely disappeared, so you’re no longer able to manifest new arms? It was simply a matter of you having ran out of energy… therefore, if I just do this –”

He casually said this as he put his hand on top of her head. For a brief moment, a faint light enveloped the entire room.

“I’ll give you an Apple. I’ve only got one with me. Supply has been tight. How is it now? You should be able to use your arms now?”

Ume heard this, and stared nervously at an empty vitamin bottle lying in the corner of the room.

Instantly – “BAM” – with a deafening sound, the dark-colored glass bottle completely shattered.

“Aha – !” Ume smiled like the light of spring replacing the cold winter, and she jumped up and down in joy.

“Awesome, awesome! My arms are back! Zeki-kun, you’re the best!”

The Meat Doll couldn’t understand their conversation at all, but she felt an odd feeling and couldn’t help but shift back away from them.

Zekiguchi looked at the Meat Doll, and a dangerous glint briefly passed in his eyes.

“Oho.” A happy smile re-surfaced on his face as he turned towards the door.

“Well – since you’re back in action, why don’t you come help me? Ume-chan – no, my darling Long-Armed Demon. Tearsong and her happy friends just had to choose Unpleasant Counter-Current to play with, even though I told her not to touch the Seven Kobito.

The alliance is over now, and so does my assistance towards her. Before Unpleasant Counter-Current wakes up, we must destroy that Institute, kill Tearsong and everyone involved in the project!”

Ume’s body shook a little.

“We will, kill… Mmm – yes.”

With doubt in her eyes, she looked around the small room and the man lying on the ground. Then she shook her head.

“Mmm, Long-Armed Demon will try her best. So –” At the end, a fragile expression briefly passed over her face, as if she was going to cry.

“Zeki-kun, please praise me lots and lots.”

She said this softly, as if to herself, and looked back toward the room.

“I’m sorry, Kurukiyo. It seems I really can’t keep living as a human anymore. But I am very happy to have lived as Aizawa Ume with you, however brief that may be.”

The girl calling herself the Long-Armed Demon shed one single tear, and walked into the open door.

Zekiguchi watched her and opened his arms happily.

“Ah, right. No one has confirmed this, but I have information that says the Institute also captured Yono. Damn them. If they dare to harm my Yono, I won’t forgive them. Aha, you probably don’t know who ‘Yono’ is – she’s Gankyū Eguriko.”

“Gankyū-san?”

Ume was very surprised. Somehow, the Meat Doll also responded to these words: “Gankyū – Eguriko. Guriko, chan.”

Zekiguchi smiled with his lupine eyes. No one knew if he heard that reply or not.

“Mmm, I must save her, my darling Poisoned Apple. If Yono dies in there – then everything would be ruined.”

“No.” The Meat Doll said concisely. “Don’t, save her.”

“What?” With a genuine happiness, Zakiguchi looked at the Meat Doll: “What did you say, miss?”

“No –”

The Meat Doll didn’t know the meaning of what she was about to say: “No. If Guriko-chan – comes back, stay with us, then Sensei will – always, talk to Guriko-chan. I want – him, to only look at, me… huh?”

The Meat Doll moved her hand to touch her lips and her eyes widened.

Then she smiled amid her confusion.

“No. Everyone – get along well. That’s the best.”

“Hihihi.” Zekiguchi showed a devilish smile as he stared at the Meat Doll.

“You’re coming along very well in your broken state. Are you almost completely gone now? But – hmm, before I prepare the dinner and finish everything, why don’t you keep sleeping, Snow White.”

The devil disappeared with his demon after saying those enigmatic words.

The Meat Doll silently watched them depart, and casually looked down on her palms. Suddenly, tears welled from her eyes, and the Meat Doll started crying for no reason.

Night 5: Vomit

Saibara Mitsuki's diary, 4th April, 2003

I heard writing a diary can help people to look at themselves objectively. However, I have some doubts towards that claim. That's because my big sister said that to me, and she's someone who's obviously incapable of evaluating herself objectively. In fact, it must be a fake claim. But I momentarily believed big sister's words and bought a diary, so I am an idiot.

This will probably become a diary full of self-derision, accusations, hatred, and be altogether despicable. However, I've decided to waste large amounts of paper, pencils, and my time, to record every day of my life until I despair at my feelings of emptiness and stop.

My personality is such that I am easily bored. Plus, every day is boring as well. I don't think I'll want to write for very long.

This empty world, this boring life, and this boring self.

I'd say I won't write for more than three days.

But I also hope big sis won't force her own hobbies onto me. I found a few years' worth of diaries while cleaning big sis's room, and that scared me. Their contents were pitiable and twisted, as gloomy as big sis herself.

I'm the same.

Unpleasant Counter-Current has two personalities.

The parasitism of the Greater Fragment twisted the personality of the human Saibara Mitsuki, giving birth to the personality of the angel and that of the fallen angel. As an angel, she normally loved others with a pure and innocent heart, only metamorphosing into the personification of retribution, reflecting evil back onto evil-doers if she detected malevolence. However, if Unpleasant Counter-Current, whose role was to uphold and dispense justice, started to hate, fear, and blame others – then Mitsuki's heart would become that of the fallen angel. And in that role, she would continuously destroy everything around her, until both the malevolence that filled her and her soul were completely spent.

Terror. Hatred. Vengeance. If the world allowed the ‘angel’ of justice feel such negative emotions, then it deserved to be destroyed. This one-sided slaughter was also Unpleasant Counter-Current’s ‘role’.

However, the Bible dictates that fallen angels can never destroy God, the world, or humans.

Thus, the fallen angel would be destroyed at the end of her rampage due to her inescapable fate.

Yes – even fallen angels were only a pawns created by the omnipotent God, who used fate to eliminate fallen angels to prove His absolutel power and justice.

She couldn’t see anything.

Her sight, hearing, and smell were all gone. She was confused. Her sense of taste and touch were also suppressed. Mitsuki’s body had lost the majority of its functions.

She didn’t know how long it has been due to her lack of sensations.

She also couldn’t tell where she was and what was being done to her.

It seemed like she was placed onto an operating table and her body was being toyed with.

The angel and the fallen angel were battling within Mitsuki’s mind.

“Crunch crunch crunch.”

Hearing? Touch? What nerves remained in her feeble body felt something and reported it to the brain.

“Crunch crunch crunch.”

This sound?

This feeling?

This incomprehensible, throbbing, painful feeling. She smiled when she saw its true face.

It was so ridiculous that she laughed out loud.

“Ha –”

She was being eaten.

“Hahaha –” She opened her eyes a crack, purely out of willpower, and saw an unknown monster eating up her feet, arms, and flesh. Those were ordinary, common monsters. She had destroyed countless monsters like this with Tatsue, Mitaka, and Mina.

Her friends… Mitsuki’s consciousness was instantly enveloped by happiness as soon as she thought of this. But she soon heard the unwanted voices of human researchers around her and stopped thinking.

“We’ve only fed ordinary Apple-Holders to monsters so far. But this is the first time we’ve experimented with the owner of a Greater Fragment –”

“I heard that a Fragment eaten by monsters will disappear? A Greater Fragment plays a role in the world. If one of them disappears, we don’t know what would happen to the world –”

“She’ll regenerate as long as we leave her sensory organ alone. Let them eat everything except the heart.”

What are they –

Saying?

What are they saying?

I don’t get it, I don’t understand. What are they talking about while watching me getting eaten up?

The future of humanity?

A dream towards eternity?

The search towards the truth?

Mitsuki shivered. Her body wouldn’t stop shaking.

Her thoughts were cut off every second, getting dimmer and dimmer.

She wanted to vomit.

Malevolence – circulated throughout her body with her blood.

“Stop…” Mitsuki begged with the last of her strength.

“Stop. Don’t – eat me, dissect me – anymore – stop.”

“She’s talking about something –”

“Ignore her.”

“We’ll discover the composition of immortality, and benefit the entire human race –”

The entire lower half of her body had already been devoured by the monsters, but these researchers didn’t even flinch.

Mitsuki felt that – just like her – other humans were perhaps also being cut open, toyed with, and killed throughout this Institute. The malevolence of the monsters and the Apple-Holders swallowed up this profound sin and this Hell.

“You want to know the composition of immortality…” Mitsuki spoke frankly as she twitched. “… that’s impossible. Don’t make me laugh. Puny folks like you… you dare to want to defy God and obtain truth?”

The researchers panicked and leaned backwards, walking away as they pulled out handguns. They don’t want to die that much? They’re useless even while alive. They will only hate each other and harm others.

“Stop being so arrogant, you fallen humans!”

Contrary to her tone and her words, Mitsuki’s face was covered with sadness - a sliced up face where pieces of bones could be seen, bearing no resemblance to the cute girl of former days.

Mitsuki begged farewell to those she loved with the last remnant of her consciousness.

“Mi-chan, Tatsu-chan, big sis, I’m sorry. I’ve already – ”

Mitsuki's body bounced up. The surrounding machinery gave out sparks and exploded. People screamed. The entire room shook. The monsters who had just been consuming Mitsuki froze, opening their eyes wide in fear.

"Urk, hiss hiss hiss." Mitsuki's body started to crack.

"Uwoooooaaaahhhh!"

The mouth in her abdomen, which she tried her best to seal off – opened up, releasing an unbelievable torrent of black liquid.

That sticky black liquid – so similar to the fire and brimstone that consumed Sodom and Gomorrah – swept monsters aside and dissolved them. The researchers were also enveloped and annihilated despite their cries.

Mitsuki stretched out her hand, wanting to stop that flood of malevolence, but even her form was soon swallowed up by the darkness, never to be seen again.

"What –"

Sakaki Ganhō stared wide-eyed at the darkening screens, which were blinking with a purple light. It had been so quick. While he was thinking, screams had come from the room experimenting on Saibara Mitsuki, right before some black substance erupted –

"Lab, lab number one! Report your status!" He kept calling into the phone next to him, but there was no reply.

Had Mitsuki's rampage destroyed the room? No, even an immortal could not defeat armed researchers, not when she had been dissected and had lost large amounts of her body.

Moreover, it wasn't only that laboratory experiencing abnormalities.

Lab number one – which had experimented on the Greater Fragment Unpleasant Counter-Current – was only the epicentre. The rooms next to it had been consumed within seconds, and the rooms next to those a few seconds later. They were enveloped with darkness one after the other, with the monitors showing no more images. Some kind of black liquid had swelled up like a corrupted

wave and destroyed everything within.

Ganhō finally remembered what Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, who didn't usually show up, had said to him. That existence with an unknown gender, who told Ganhō about the existence of Apples and Kobitos, said this with a very sad voice.

– I told you to kill Unpleasant Counter-Current, but you seem to have made her an experimental subject.

– Ignorant fool. You don't know the true terror of Unpleasant Counter-Current.

– Get Berobōchō to finish her off before it's too late.

– Is that so? What a pity. Then do as you please – Ganhō.

– I'm going to run away before Unpleasant Counter-Current unveils her true powers. So scary, so scary…

"Hmph, how can this be? How can something like this happen? Hey, command central? Immediately use Berobōchō and Dullahan to sort out the situation. Lab number one on the bottommost level! Quickly!"

The 'role' of Unpleasant Counter-Current was that of the Angel of Judgement, an existence that dealt out punishment for human sins based on the degree of evil.

He had certainly heard of this theory. However, this was not the conclusion he had reached after capturing her and experimenting on her. Ganhō did not believe she was a supernatural existence like God - rather, that she was merely an existence with some special abilities, an existence that he could use, study, control.

But what Ganhō was seeing with his own eyes now was indeed something supernatural - the ultimate end of fools in legends who were punished by divine retribution.

Everything was torn down, destroyed, and annihilated. Ganhō's ambition – this Institute set up to discover eternal happiness – was

being gradually destroyed.

“Hmph!”

Ganhō shook his fist at the screen in anger. A terrible feeling encroached upon his heart, and he turned away.

That black substance would invade into this room soon. It was too dangerous to stay. But even if the Institute were completely destroyed, he could always find somewhere else to start anew as long as he was alive.

Thus, he must run away.

His research so far had not been enough to analyze the Seven Kobitos. He had been too eager, too rash. He’d never thought it would come to such a nightmarish result. *Melodia Noise was right, I am a fool. However, a great human in the past left these words of wisdom – Failure is the Mother of Success. I will prepare again, start my research again. Then, then –*
Tear Song

“Father, where are you going?”

Tatsue, lying on the ground, said this calmly. Her expression was cold and arrogant, betraying no fear towards the destruction shown in the monitors.

“It’s rare that God had prepared an appropriate retribution for you. I think you shouldn’t run away, but bear it.”

Her careless expression and voice enraged Ganhō. He walked up to her and kicked her in the ribs.

Tatsue whimpered and closed her eyes in pain.

“It’s just a small setback!” As if trying to convince himself, Ganhō covered his face with his hands.

“Eternal happiness – surpassing death, controlling fate, reaching the truth. That is the true salvation of humankind. How can it possibly stop here? I must again…”

Remaining on the ground, Tatsue opened her eyes and looked at her father with a sense of challenge. “Saving humans? Don’t make me laugh.”

And yet, she laughed.

“You’re mercilessly ignoring the agony of the people in front of you, sacrificing them for your pointless goals – someone like you would save humans? How unbearably ridiculous.”

“Don’t just say pretty words, Tatsue!” Ganhō swore in a low voice and stomped on Tatsue’s head.

“That’s how humans have always evolved. We conducted innumerable animal experiments in order to eradicate evil diseases. We herded animals to have a healthier life and better nutrition. Are you so stupid that you would not eat pork out of pity for the pigs, and so starve yourself to death? I’m not like that. I’m willing to eat animals, plants, or even humans, in order to keep living!”

Seeing Ganhō roaring like this, Tatsue looked sad.

“I see. So that’s humanity.” She would not be silent no matter how he stomped on her. This made Ganhō even more angry. “If humanity truly bears such great sin, then perhaps it should be annihilated here.”

She murmured in despair. Ganhō kicked her forcefully one last time: “I won’t be annihilated! I won’t die! I am –”

Ganhō ran away, running away from his fear of death. He was the CEO of the Sakaki Organization, who should have obtained all the happiness in the world from the moment of his birth. However, he was struggling and trying to escape fate like countless people who had gained nothing in their lives and died in despair, yelling that they don’t want to die.

Left behind by such a man, Tatsue steadfastly called out to the image of encroaching destruction despite how weak she was from the pain of Ganhō’s kicks: “Ki-chan! Please hold on just a little longer.”

Her sad words contained a blossoming love.

“Our friends will soon save –”

But Tatsue’s head fell and she lost consciousness. On the monitors, the inky black scene that rampaged throughout the Institute spread further outwards each second.

“Woah, looks like we are too late?”

“Zeki-kun! Over there, there’s a car driving away!”

A tall male was running with incredible speed, making him almost invisible to the human eye. No - to be exact, he was not running as a normal human would, not with legs and moving arms.

“Clang clang clang clang.”

Wheels.

There were wheels like those of a car growing out from the soles of his feet. The wheels rolled rapidly, thrusting him forward with an astonishing speed.

The girl without arms said out loud on top of Zekiguchi Nashinori’s shoulders, who galloped along the earth without moving.

Zekiguchi muttered in surprise after hearing her words.

“You can still see at this speed? Ume-chan, where?”

Zakiguchi’s lupine eyes rolled inward and instantly formed more intricate and bigger eyeballs, making his sight sharper. He smiled after having confirmed the identity of the man nervously driving a car in the direction the girl - Long-Armed Demon - was looking at.

He had neat clothing, hair brushed backwards on his head, and a dominating gaze in his eyes that looked down on everybody.

“Oh, Ume-chan, bingo. Isn’t that young Ganhō?”

Zekiguchi hissed his laughter and changed direction, passing through an empty factory in the dry outside air. The speed of the car was so fast that the body of the car and the tires whined in complaint, but Zekiguchi was faster.

He changed direction as he turned and jumped into the air with incredible speed, commanding loudly from right above the car of Sakaki Ganhō: “Destroy it!”

“Mmm!” Long-Armed Demon answered and screamed as she used her revived powers: “Ahhhhh!”

Two unbelievable indents suddenly appeared on the sides of the car, as if an invisible giant flattened and twisted the car with two hands.

The car turned over exaggeratedly with a blast of noise.

After the car landed, Long-Armed Demon smiled on top of Zekiguchi's shoulders, who had removed his wheels and stood casually on the ground.

"How is it – aren't Long-Armed Demon's arms very strong?"

"Mmm. Well done, well done."

Zekiguchi patted her head in praise as he watched Ganhō, who was climbing out of the wrecked car with difficulty.

Ganhō saw these two abnormalities and screamed at the top of his lungs: "Long, Long-Armed Demon - and Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
?"

Zakiguchi maintained a smile on his face as he watched Ganhō and asked evenly: "Ohoho, little Ganhō, is that crybaby around somewhere?"

Although he thought someone as shy and timid as her wouldn't stay around, Zekiguchi still asked Ganhō this question. As he expected, Ganhō kept muttering "I don't know" as if in a trance.

The ground continued to shake. This was no earthquake, but the Eternity Institute below ground suffering from a metamorphosis of the worst kind.

"Sorry, Ume-chan, I need to deal with little Ganhō. You go on ahead and save Yono - that's Gankyū Eguriko. If you can, finish off Unpleasant Counter-Current and end the entire incident. The entrance of the Institute is the factory with the words 'BABEL' over its door."

"Mm-hm." Long-Armed Demon jumped down. She looked at Zekiguchi after landing lightly on the ground.

"Zeki-kun, Long-Armed Demon will try her best, so don't discard me, ok? Don't leave me alone, ok? Long-Armed Demon won't leave Zeki-kun again."

Hearing her agitated voice, Zekiguchi nodded with a smile and watched her leave. Then he immediately moved his eyes back onto Ganhō and his expression hardened.

“Alright, little Ganhō, you really made a huge mess for me. What should I say - I shouldn’t have allowed Melodia Noise
Tear Song
to establish the Eternity Institute as her hobby from the start… Seriously, although you are my good friends in terms of effectively helping me gather Apples, you are no longer necessary since you are now hindering me from my goals, right?”

As Zekiguchi said this and walked towards Ganhō, who was lying on the ground, the latter put on a desperate expression.

“Wait, wait! At least spare my life! What do you want to know? What do you want to obtain? I am Sakaki Ganhō. No matter what you may want, I can -”

“What do I want?” Zekiguchi laughed and hugged himself like an actor on the stage. “What I want is a tale in which the jealous queen manages to defeat Snow White. Can someone like you give me a story that overturns good and evil, and twist the commands of God?”

“Wait -”

Perhaps noticing that Zekiguchi’s attitude has changed, Ganhō yelled out loud, trying to stop the other. Zekiguchi paid no attention and his face was impassive, while his body shook once.

“You allowed Sterilization Disinfection to escape because you missed the chance to destroy the temporary sensory organ she built in his head.”

From Zekiguchi’s feet, arms, head, shoulders, abdomen… All over his body…

Countless needles stretched out.

These innumerable sharp needles from Zekiguchi’s body pierced every millimeter of Sakaki Ganhō‘s flesh, ripping it apart. Blood flew everywhere. The needles penetrated the heart, the sensory organ where the Fragment resided, and pulled it out.

“Aaaaaa…”

What was Ganhō thinking in his last moments? - His hand remained stretched towards the sky, his eyes gazed upwards towards the heavens, and he drew his last breath.

“Mmm, being pierced with so many needles, of course you’re going to die.”

Zekiguchi said with a soft voice. He felt all over Ganhō‘s corpse and smiled when he confirmed the lack of life there.

“Excellent, little Ganhō. Dying here is a rather happy ending, isn’t it?”

“Hehe.” The devil named Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
smiled.

Awesome.

Long-Armed Demon was once again excited at her own supernatural power.

“Bend!” The tough steel bars were bent.

“Fly!” The machines blocking her way were blown away.

“Break!” With Long-Armed Demon’s command, the solid wall shattered and scattered as if it was merely a sand castle.

“Ohoho, hehehehe.”

Long-Armed Demon had just kept running since she invaded the spacious underground Institute through the factory Zekiguchi told her about. Nothing could stop her. Whether walls, floors, ceilings, unknown machines or scaffolds, Long-Armed Demons could completely shatter them just by stretching out her invisible arms.

She couldn’t even use chopsticks after she lost her ability. After having lived powerlessly as Aizawa Ume for a few months, Long-Armed Demon realized just how convenient and how powerful her invisible arms were.

She casually destroyed everything around her and laughed in happiness.

“Ahahaha! How is it - Long-Armed Demon’s two arms are very very long! They are also very powerful! They won’t lose to anyone!”

Long-Armed Demon yelled and rushed down the stairs joyously. Zekiguchi’s orders were to save Gankyū Eguriko and finish off the existence named Unpleasant Counter-Current.

She didn’t know what Unpleasant Counter-Current looked like, and she ran along the Institute looking for anyone who might give her more details.

Strange tremors kept coming through the surrounding walls and the floor, making it hard to run. Zekiguchi did say something about counter currents, but Long-Armed Demon didn’t understand that. Just what exactly happened in this Institute place?

She heard human screams when she descended onto the lowest floor.

It was completely dark, and there were unsettlingly tragic screams. Long-Armed Demon knotted her brows and carefully approached the direction from where the sounds came.

This place seemed to be a dim prison. There were prison cells with iron bars along the corridor, from which a heavy stench of mold and decay emanated.

Humans, their eyes full of fear, were packed into these cells like lab animals.

Seeing a small girl approach them, these people showed a confused expression at first. However, they immediately moved closer to her and yelled while holding onto the iron bars: “You, you! Help - help us get out of here!”

“Help us escape!”

“It’s so scary! So scary! I’m so scared!”

Long-Armed Demon was a little frightened by these animalistic cries and took a few steps backwards, but she did give this some serious thought.

Zekiguchi said to kill everyone involved with the Institute, but these people look like they were victims taken in here. It should be fine to let them escape.

“I get it. You guys back off a little bit! It’s dangerous!”

Long-Armed Demon shouted with a serious expression, and the people backed off.

Having made sure everyone had backed away, Long-Armed Demon released countless ‘arms’ with a powerful yell.

“Woah!”

Those iron bars, which would not even bend under the strength of the strongest human wrists, were instantly twisted apart as if they were no tougher than cooked noodles.

“You’re awesome!”

“Thank you, thank you!”

The imprisoned people thanked her one after the other and ran away. Some of them even had tears in their eyes.

Just what had they been subjected to down here? Long-Armed Demon pondered this as she replied to their happy expressions with her own soft smile.

Compared to torturing, hurting, or killing others -

It felt better to make someone smile out of happiness.

“What a surprise.”

There was suddenly a low voice.

“I am surprised at your appearance, but I am most surprised at you saving humans.”

“Who’s there?”

Long-Armed Demon turned towards where the sound was coming from, but she couldn’t see very well due to the darkness.

She walked carefully deeper into the corridor, and didn’t forget to bend the iron bar with her ‘arms’ to help people imprisoned inside.

At the end of the foul-smelling prison – within a particularly strong cell –

“Ahh –”

Long-Armed Demon unconsciously shut her right eye. The eyeball there was gorged out by the person sitting in front of her.

Long-Armed Demon can’t forget that.

The pain… and the terror.

“Gankyū – Eguriko-san.” That person showed a disgusted face when Long-Armed Demon called her name.

“Just Guriko is fine.”

She had an unique wolf-like hair cut and eyes as deep as gun barrels. She had also somehow lost both her arms just like Long-Armed Demon – she was Gankyū Eguriko, an opponent who had once humiliated Long-Armed Demon and defeated her.

“It’s been a long while, Long-Armed Demon.”

“Mmm –”

Long-Armed Demon nodded and bent the iron bars of the other’s prison while keeping up her guard.

Guriko seemed somewhat surprised. Despite not having her arms, she got up lithely and walked towards Long-Armed Demon.

“Why are you saving me?”

Long-Armed Demon turned her face away at the question: “Zeki-kun said – he said he will be troubled if Guriko-san dies… Long-Armed Demon doesn’t like you anyways. Long-Armed Demon would be happier if you die.”

“Zekiguchi… Nashinori?”

Guriko pronounced this name as if she was thinking about something, but her face instantly returned to its former seriousness and she began to walk along the corridor.

“Never mind. I don’t know why you are here but – it’s time to run away, Long-Armed Demon.”

“Run away?”

Guriko anxiously looked at Long-Armed Demon when she heard the latter’s surprised tone.

“Can’t you feel this? Can’t you feel the vibrations and the vengeance that’s driving us to do evil? This aura? This scent? I can’t explain it, but it’s bad, and this place is very dangerous. You helped me a lot in getting me out. All in all…” Guriko said all this in one breath, and suddenly lifted her head.

“What?”

There was a strange sound. The sound of things grinding against each other, or nails scratching away at something. Long-Armed Demon noticed it too. Her expression changed, and she stared at the ceiling. At the same time as the drilling, shattering, and shrill sounds were coming through, a disturbing laughter could also be heard.

“Bam, scratch scratch, squeak squeak squeak.”

“What is this?”

Guriko was appalled and ran towards the entrance. Long-Armed Demon hurried to follow her.

“What’s wrong, Guriko-san? You know that laugh?”

“Yes, a despicable monster.

Then she pronounced a name that surprised Long-Armed Demon.

“Its name seems to be… something like ‘Berobōchō’.”

Berobōchō? That Berobōchō?

As Long-Armed Demon widened her eyes, the silver alien form went through the ceiling and showed himself.

The scene in front of him made it impossible for him to believe this to be reality.

The intermittent earthquake, the people with terror and confusion on their faces, the countless monsters in a riot, and the SWAT teams wearing riot gear and spreading out everywhere.

This industrial area in the middle of the mountainside, devoid of uniqueness or liveliness – it was still ordinary when Takamikado Mitaka returned to his original 'snake' form and escaped through the bars to seek help.

That was only some minutes ago, no longer than an hour. That was enough for the world to be stained by Hell.

"Oi – Snake."

A remarkably striking man with blond hair and blue eyes stood amidst this place dominated by madness. Sakaki Guryū turned with shock to look at Mitaka, who had already reverted to his human form.

"Guriko and Tatsue are really in there?"

Mitaka, who sought help from the outside after Mitsuki's urging, chose this man out of desperation.

As an Apple-Holder, this man should be immortal, and therefore more useful than an average human. He was also the next CEO of the Sakaki Organization. Even if he proves to be useless on the field, he would be able to summon up the army or SWAT team just for being a Sakaki. In fact, Sakaki's involvement alone had rapidly mobilized numerous soldiers.

Half a year ago, Mitaka had targeted the Apple belonging to Usagawa Rinne, the girl whom Sakaki loves. He had heard of this man's experiences, situation, and abilities. Sakaki was perhaps not enough to be the opponent of an unknown monster, but Mitaka believed Sakaki was definitely the best of humans when it comes to abilities.

Of course, Sakaki did not believe Mitaka at first. He would not respond no matter how the latter begged him. However, when Mitaka bit himself with his own sharp fangs, cried and begged and

told Sakaki that he was willing to do anything to repay this favor, Sakaki finally made a move. He and Guriko had both changed – Mitaka murmured to himself in reminiscence.

Changed? I don't know about that.

That's not important. Now I just want to save my hard-earned friends. Eternal life means nothing to me. I have already found a happiness that is incomparable even with immortality.

– Tatsue.

As he remembered her face, he could not remain calm any longer.

But –

"Ohohoho, what a ruckus."

Another man, who was being propped up by Mitaka, spoke those incongruous words carelessly. Contrary to his tone, he had a serious look, but that could not be ascertained due to the long fringe covering his eyes.

He said his name was Nageki Kurukiyo.

He appeared to be a detective despite his appearance. He was also wounded, and even moving took a great effort.

The three of them met each other close by. Once he knew they were headed to the same place, this man demanded to accompany them. Mitaka couldn't remember the exact route due to his hasty escape, but Nageki somehow knew this place and they finally arrived here under his guidance.

He was a great help based on this, but it was not the time to relax – how did Nageki know where the Institute was?

"The entrance of the underground Institute is that factory with words on it."

Mitaka dragged Nageki and moved towards the factory as quickly as he could.

"I must save Tatsue and everyone else, so that's why I am going. What about you guys?"

“Of course I’m going.”

“Alright alright, I’m going too.”

Sakaki replied firmly, while Nageki lifted up his hand and chimed in. Mitaka looked at them doubtfully as he ran, and spoke while furrowing his brows: “Do you really understand what’s going on? An unimaginably twisted world should have covered the entire underground facility by now. You can’t just step in there carelessly due to curiosity or interest.”

Sakaki ignored him and moved quickly forward, while Nageki also ran forward while leaning on Mitaka’s shoulder and smiling.

“Hehe, it seems our positions are different, but we have very similar goals. If I were to turn back here due to fear, then I wouldn’t have even come here in the first place. I don’t think stopping us now would work. You are a very considerate young man.”

“I’m older than you.”

Mitaka replied with a slightly twisted expression and kept dragging Nageki forward. Mitaka was much shorter than Nageki, and dragging him like this was starting to tire Mitaka out. But this wasn’t the time to care about this. They needed as much manpower on their side as possible.

Mitaka wanted to save Tatsue and everyone else. Sakaki also wanted to save them, but he also seemed to want to investigate within this Institute to find something about the secret of the Meat Dolls. As for Nageki’s goal, it appeared simply to be the destruction of the Institute. He also mentioned he wanted to look for a girl who had gone missing.

Everything was tangled together in complicated ways, making it impossible to be understood.

So Mitaka decided not to think about this anymore.

Now he must be focused in achieving his goal.

I don’t know what three lone weak humans can do together, but I can’t leave behind my important friends.

I can't leave behind Mitsuki, who was crying alone in her dark cell; Tatsue, the first person to give me hug; Mina, the person who listened to my uncertainties.

I won't live as the remnant of the house of Snakes that betrayed God and tricked humans eons ago.

Nor will I live as the human Takamikado Mitaka, who held a twisted love towards Tatsue.

I will live and act as myself.

"Half a year ago, Gankyū Eguriko asked me what my goal was. I couldn't answer that then, but I can answer it now!"

Following behind Sakaki, who kicked down the door of the factory, Mitaka ran alongside Nageki. A few monsters were uncontrollably destroying everything within the building, making it impossible to go near the entrance leading underground.

"This is – my answer!"

Mitaka's actions spoke louder than words. He did not stop even for a second and kept running as if he was whipping this appallingly weak human body to its limit.

There were suddenly crisp gunshot sounds.

One was from Sakaki, who was running ahead of them. The other was from Nageki, who was beside Mitaka.

Blood spurted out in beautiful patterns from the bodies of the monster. They fell to the ground in agony and roared, but the two men quickly riddled every monster that approached them with bullets.

The incredible detective smiled as he looked at Sakaki with a joyous expression: "Ohoho, this is the first time I've seen an ordinary person with such a good aim."

Sakaki frowned out of distaste and looked away: "And this is the first time I've seen a detective wielding duel pistols."

They soon arrived at the stairs, but Mitaka was strangely feeling very tired.

– Mom. Mom, who is it? Is it a visitor?

– Ume-chan, don't come out! Quickly, run….

– Why, Mom?

– Ume-chan, run!

– Why… why is there a knife coming out of Dad's mouth?

"What-a-beautiful-night-"

Aizawa Ume – Long-Armed Demon – sang an incongruously lively song in this dark place with innumerable prison cells as if grasping onto a fleeing hope.

Her expression was empty and her body shook, with her singing voice reverberating with some strange emotion.

Her song reverberated against the walls and the ground, falling upon the silver monster – the incredulous existence that Melodia Noise Tear Song
called 'Berobōchō' – who spun down from above.

In its metallic, mineral-like body, only its long, drooping tongue was organic. And as if maddened with delight, it scraped its knives together and sang after Ume's voice.

"The-Moon-is-beautiful-" Hearing that abnormal sound, Long-Armed Demon's face fell.

"Humans-are-annoying-"

Ume closed her eyes and bit her lips, as if she was enduring something. Then she looked at Guriko, who was standing on the spot, and asked with a timid expression: "Guriko-san, what did you say this thing was – called?"

"What? Oh, I'm not very clear on the details!"

Guriko made a half-hearted reply as she thought about how to

escape from this crisis without having either of her arms.

“Its name should be Berobōchō. He was a human, and was modified by someone called Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
. That’s what the person calling herself Melodia Noise
Tear Song
said.”

“Berobōchō – Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, modified?” Long-Armed Demon’s face fell with an agonized expression and she looked down on her feet, muttering to herself.

“What’s wrong? What’s wrong – Zeki-kun, Long-Armed Demon doesn’t understand!”

“Uwahhhh!”

Berobōchō was not kind enough to allow her to maintain her confusion. It rushed towards them with a roar and lifted its blade-like right arm – and it swung down towards Long-Armed Demon without hesitation.

“Ahh –” Long-Armed Demon opened her eyes wide and jumped aside quickly. Her eyes were two balls of flame.

“You, you!”

Berobōchō’s face was smashed with a powerful force, and its great body shook. That ability which gave Guriko so much trouble – that invisible arm akin to a psychic power – seemed still to be around.

However –

“Shing shing shing.”

It was completely useless? Instead, Berobōchō made a delighted sound and stood its ground again. Its head, reflecting a dull light, was not even dented.

Long-Armed Demon could only jump around with her legs. She stared angrily at the silver monster and moaned in a low voice.

“I remember this feeling. I dream of it – every night. I can’t forget it, how can I forget it. You destroyed everything in my life! You

destroyed my life, destroyed Aizawa Ume, made me into a demon. You are the one who made me into Long-Armed Demon…"

Long-Armed Demon screamed in anguish and got up, and she kept releasing her 'arms'.

"So you're still alive, Berobōchō! But I dismembered you! You are the robber who killed my parents and cut off my arm. How bold! Berobōchō, that's how the magazines called you, no? You are the robber who stabbed knives into the back of the victim's head so it would come out of their mouths; that's how you killed, Shigue Benimaru!"

She roared like an animal and attacked Berobōchō with the fury of an assault rifle.

"Fine! Come at me! My nightmare, my nemesis, my sworn enemy! I will send you to Hell no matter how many times you come to me, you bastard robberrrrrrrrrrrr!"

Her power exploded with a bam and Berobōchō's body tilted under the shockwaves.

However.

"Clang, shing!"

That was only momentary. Berobōchō immediately broke through Long-Armed Demon's disorganized attacking arms and walked straight towards her.

"No way – it didn't work?"

Long-Armed Demon opened her eyes wide and her face became serious. How can this be…? Guriko also wondered. Long-Armed Demon's attack was enough to smash tombstones and dismember human bodies, and its power can be compared to a cannon. This thing took a few hits straight to the face and didn't even receive a wound, let alone falling down. This monster – was the strongest Guriko had ever seen in terms of defensive abilities.

Guriko didn't know the relationship between Long-Armed Demon and the monster.

All she knew was that Berobōchō was attracted towards attacking Long-Armed Demon like a bee drawn to flowers. It moved over,

moved closer to her – and made that alien pose Guriko saw before in the factory, putting both its arms above its head.

“Long-Armed Demon, run!”

Before Long-Armed Demon, who was staring at it in shock, Berobōchō turned into a silver spintop. Obeying centrifugal force, it twirled all its limbs – those sharp knives – horizontally. Anyone would be killed instantly if they were caught in there.

Long-Armed Demon hit the ground with her ‘arms’ at the last minute and jumped upwards. She then stepped powerfully against the ceiling and jumped out at an angle, landing behind Berobōchō and escaped.

“Ha, ha – ha.”

Long-Armed Demon’s breathing was getting faster and faster and tears were even swelling out of her eyes, whether because of terror or tiredness. She definitely didn’t have enough experience with battles, and she didn’t seem to know how to deal with an enemy her ‘arms’ could not handle.

Guriko and the Long-Armed Demon stood with Berobōchō between them.

But this monster completely ignored Guriko and only attacked Long-Armed Demon. Was there really something between them that Guriko didn’t know about?

“You… why, why… why won’t you die?”

Berobōchō was pushed down by the invisible fists together with some weak banging sounds. A small distance away, Guriko said towards Long-Armed Demon, who was fighting in the same way over and over: “Long-Armed Demon! Aim at the tongue! Berobōchō’s entire body is hard as armor, and the only part made of flesh and blood is the tongue!”

Long-Armed Demon’s expression became hopeful again after hearing Guriko’s suggestion, and she smiled cutely.

“Hehe, Guriko-san is as cunning as ever!”

“Shut it.” Guriko didn’t like the other’s bluntness and frowned.

“That aside, hurry up and finish it off! I’ve got a bad feeling about this. I want to escape from here for no reason.”

“Mmm –” Long-Armed Demon took a deep breath and looked at Berobōchō with determined eyes. The silver monster, appearing like the personification of knives, rushed towards her fearlessly like a beast!”

“Hya!”

Long-Armed Demon put all her power into her ‘arms’ and locked her target as Berobōchō’s tongue, the only organ it has exposed.

Instantly.

Berobōchō’s two arms crossed over each other.

It detected Long-Armed Demon’s target was its tongue, so it moved to defend itself? Though it was hit right on its face with the invisible fists, Berobōchō didn’t seem to care. It laughed as it cut a X-shaped pattern in the air.

What did that mean?

It was as if Long-Armed Demon’s untouchable and invisible arms were cut.

“Huh, no!”

Long-Armed Demon’s entire body bend backwards and screamed painfully. She then stared at Berobōchō, who was walking closer to her, with an agonizing expression.

“No, no way… Long-Armed Demon’s two arms – the crystallizations of energy – were all cut up.”

“Long-Armed Demon!”

Guriko yelled and rushed forward. She jumped up and landed a flying kick on Berobōchō’s back. She already knew Berobōchō only has blades on its arms and legs based on their previous encounters.

Berobōchō lifted up its leg and waved its arms about in an annoyed manner to keep Guriko occupied.

So its target was Long-Armed Demon after all?

For just a moment, Guriko thought she should just leave the girl behind as bait and run away, but she shook her head and got rid of that thought. *She saved me. It would be cold to leave her here and run away.*

Guriko laughed at herself.

– Look at me, talking about reverting back to a monster.

I can't even be completely merciless and cold. How am I like a monster at all?

I can't maintain my position as a human, not can I return to being a monster – Guriko smiled and took hold of the spoon in the chest pocket of her shirt with her mouth, then blew it out.

"Clang."

As she expected, this strike bounded off Berobōchō's hard skin and landed on the ground. However brief it was, that did manage to divert its attention. Guriko called out to Long-Armed Demon during that time.

"Long-Armed Demon – listen, I have a plan."

"What? Huh, yep!"

It seemed the rumor about Berobōchō having being a human was real. Long-Armed Demon appeared to know it.

That's got nothing to do with me. But the question is – even though Berobōchō had almost lost all its ability to talk, it could still understand our speech.

Just then, Berobōchō defended when it heard me say 'aim for the tongue'. So what should I do? That's easy. I'll have to use a roundabout way, make it so the opponent won't understand our goal even if he can hear us.

It would be a gamble to see whether Long-Armed Demon can understand my words – but I see no other options.

"Long-Armed Demon, Berobōchō's defences are too powerful! You can't defeat it with your attacks!"

“Mmm – I hate to admit it, but it seems to be the case… And?”

Long-Armed Demon kept punching at Berobōchō from a distance using her ‘arm’s, while genuinely listening to Guriko’s words. She seemed to have an honest, straightforward personality. Did she forget that her eyeballs were gorged out by this woman a few months ago?

This kind of honest personality can be fatal on the battlefield, where each party seeks to kill each other. However, Guriko didn’t dislike this version of her.

She called out to Long-Armed Demon, her face full of seriousness.

“There was a story like this in Greek mythology.”

All her opponents, starting from Snake and Sterilization Disinfection, loved to talk about myths. This made Guriko think there might be some hints into the situation in myths and spent a long time in the library, devoting herself to reading books concerning mythology. This was one of the topics that somewhat interested her.

“Herakles, who was told to perform twelve great labors, had to fight the Nemean Lion as his first trial. The Nemean Lion had a hide that cannot be scratched by any sword or spear, and claws that could tear everything apart.”

Guriko evenly laid out the outline of the story. Herakle’s Eleventh Labor was to fetch the Golden Apples and even though she thought this may be connected to the Apples of Eden, she could get nothing out of it after reading the story thoroughly. The story of the Nemean Lion was something she read about while looking up the Golden Apples.

“The king ordered Herakles to skin the hide from that lion and bring it back. Herakles discovered he could strangle the lion instead of using any weapon to wound it. So he held the lion and strangled it. However, he was troubled with skinning the Lion, since the hide was too tough to be torn off.”

Does she get tired from keep using her ‘arms’? Long-Armed Demon started sweating and her breathing became faster, and her expression became strained. Guriko prayed she could understand

the story and continued: “What do you think Herakles did?”

Berobōchō’s right arm hammered into the wall close to Long-Armed Demon. It was getting harder and harder for Long-Armed Demon to block her enemy’s attacks –

“He suddenly had an idea and tried to use the teeth of the lion, which could tear anything apart, to damage the hide. At the end, despite being very time consuming, he finally removed the hide… Did you get that?”

Seeing Long-Armed Demon had a puzzled expression, Guriko yelled out of worry: “Ahhh, lemme try again! Do you know how to polish a diamond? The hardest mineral in the world?”

“Mmm, hah, I know this one! I saw this on TV in Kurukiyo’s house. It’s that, you get a bunch of smaller diamonds, and you polish and grind them together like a file – Ahh!”

Long-Armed Demon finally realized what Guriko was trying to say and stared with round open eyes. Guriko smiled as she saw the other’s hopeful eyes.

“Now, do you get it?”

“OK.” Long-Armed Demon replied with a slight smile: “Come on. That was all? Easy.”

“Hwahhhh!”

Berobōchō made an ominous noise as if having detected something strange. Its two arms swung towards Long-Armed Demon and grabbed her invisible fingers. However, its arm strength was not enough to fling away those arms that could unearth and throw out gravestones.

“And now – Hehehehe!”

Long-Armed Demon laughed evilly.

At the same time, a cruel and unbearable scene began to unfold. Berobōchō’s two arms, which were knives on their own, began to be pulled towards its own neck by those invisible arms.

“Creak creak!”

“Eeee – eeeeeaaaaa?”

A piercing and heavy sound of grinding echoed throughout the area like the sound of some giant machine being operated.

Berobōchō’s two arms were grinding back and forth in order to severe its own neck.

Since they should have the same hardness, the arms should be able to cut open the neck when grinding against it with a high frequency.

If they can cut it open, then they can cut it off. If its neck can be cut off – then it can be killed.

“Eeee, eeeeerr, aaaa.” Its neck was instantly cut open by the two rapidly cutting knives approaching from both sides. And then – Berobōchō’s head bounced off like a toy.

“Woah – ahahahaha!”

Long-Armed Demon roared with laughter like the Devil himself. She stared at Berobōchō’s headless corpse, which was spurting blood and slowly falling to the ground. A plain human body seemed to be encased under that armor-like tough skin.

“How was that? Even a robber is only a human! How can you win against a demon! Ahaha, hahahaha!”

As if she was discarding something important to her, Long-Armed Demon had an expression that said she had let everything go. She looked just like Guriko a few months ago, when she swore to revert to being a monster. She can never go back to normality, Guriko thought this as she looked at the bloodstained Long-Armed Demon.

“Hehe.” Long-Armed Demon laughed and ran merrily towards Guriko, as if she was a child showing off her good grades to her parents.

“How did I do? Was Long-Armed Demon good! Guriko-san gave me the best suggestion!”

“Wait! Wait, wait! Don’t jump on me! I don’t have arms – I can’t catch…”

“Bang.” The two girls without arms happily rammed their heads

together.

Dullahan.

It was not Long-Armed Demon and Guriko, who were fighting for their lives, that stopped the Eternity Institute from disintegrating when it approached destruction, no, bordered annihilation from Unpleasant Counter-Current going out of control – nor was it Sakaki and his friends invading the building, nor was it Ganhō who was busily escaping, nor was it the powerless researchers.

Dullahan.

It had no consciousness, no emotions, and only acted mechanically according to the orders given to it. This strange monster could be called the grandest masterpiece amongst the achievements of the Eternity Institute.

Either fortunately or unfortunately, not even one of those researchers who would have praised Dullahan's wondrous reaction were left.

An existence consisting of only a head was looking at that monster, which was crowned with the name of the headless knight in Celtic mythology, with a gaze full of disgust and shame.

"What bad taste."

The lowest level of the Eternity Institute was separated into four sections.

The north side had a row of laboratories, numbered one through eight. Laboratory number one was all but destroyed due to the black corrosive torrents that Mitsuki gorged out.

The eastern side were prison cells.

The western side contained elevators and stairs, and other public facilities.

The south side had a small room that allowed one to review the entire Institute.

That was the room covered with monitors where Ganhō and Tatsue had their conversation. Ganhō had already run away, leaving only Tatsue lying unconscious on the ground.

A glass container with Mina's head inside was placed near the entrance of the room, close to the open door. Mina looked worriedly at Tatsue, who had fainted on the ground. But she could not move, and therefore could not save Tatsue.

Mina had been shut up inside the glass container ever since her arrival and was carried about by Ganhō.

She therefore obtained a lot of information concerning the Institute from Ganhō.

He seemed to want information regarding the Fragments or the Kobito from Mina, but either fortunately or unfortunately, he left Mina behind and ran away as soon as the emergency was declared.

Emergency.

Mitsuki turned into a Fallen Angel, and lost control of the Unpleasant Counter-Current.

This was Mina's greatest fear.

The being that told Mina this information – God Mushi Emperor – said that as the Fallen Angel, Unpleasant Counter-Current would ultimately exhaust the power of her Fragment and die from energy depletion.

Mitsuki will deplete the power of her soul – her Fragment – to release this black corrosive torrent that can dissolve and consume all.

How much time was left before her Fragment becomes completely depleted?

Mina could not bear being immobile when Mitsuki was in such danger.

"Dullahan, that's what Ganhō called it, right? The headless knight from Celtic mythology? Whoever named it wasn't too bright."

She was looking at the central hall that connected the four quarters of the lowest level. Something was using the white mist sprayed out

of spray cans, and stopped the black corrosive current from swelling out of the north side –

“Keep going, stop it there!”

As Mina waited for backup, whether any was coming or not, she spoke to the image of Dullahan on the screen with irony.

“It is your ‘role’ to destroy all ‘malevolence’ – my body.”

Dullahan, the creature fighting against the black tsunami with a spray can each in its hand, was none other than Mina’s – Sterilization Disinfection’s – body.

The darkness of Unpleasant Counter-Current that wished to dissolve and devour all was battling against the whiteness of Sterilization Disinfection that stopped it midway in the lowest level.

“What’s that strange sound?”

“Don’t relax just yet, Long-Armed Demon.”

From the eastern side –

– Two girls without arms showed themselves after having kicked down the door to the wing with the prison cells.

Gankyū Eguriko – the immortal girl who lived a thousand years and specialized in gorging out eye balls – and Long-Armed Demon, someone with supernatural abilities who chose to became Zekiguchi Nashinori’s servant in order to survive.

At the same time –

“Oh? This is quite a big space. Where are we?”

“Sakaki… I trusted you because I saw you kept walking while looking very confident in yourself, but you actually had no idea where you were going?”

Under the leadership of Sakaki Guryū, the next CEO of the Sakaki Organization, Takamikado Mitaka walked down the stairs from the western side, carrying an unconscious Nageki Kurukiyo on his back.

They had looked for Tatsue and Guriko as they fought the monsters

surrounding them. Whether out of pain or tiredness, Nageki had fainted halfway and Mitaka had to carry him.

Everyone stood still out of fear for a split second, but instantly shouted out the names of those they knew.

“Guriko?”

“Nageki!”

“Sakaki – what are you doing here?”

“What’s with that headless monster –”

Mitaka murmured to himself as he saw Dullahan, who stood alone battling against the black corrosive torrent with spray cans in its hands. It seemed it was thanks to this headless monster’s resistance that the black substance did not flow out. But he didn’t know how long that was going to last. He must find Tatsue and Mina quickly.

He looked around and paused when he looked towards the southern side – a human head, looking lost, was placed near the open door. She was somehow inside a glass jar, as if she was a specimen.

“Mina!”

“Oho, Mitaka… we’re saved. Your little princess is right behind me.” The head still looked composed and spoke with a charming smile even in this situation.

Mitaka looked in and saw Tatsue lying unconscious in an incredulous room full of monitors.

Mina and Tatsue were both alive – no, perhaps Tatsue was still in danger. Mina, on the other hand, was definitely still alive.

Mitaka felt relieved as he cursed his knees, which were weak with worry, and stepped forward.

However, an unfamiliar girl without her arms ran up to him and jumped straight up as if she was a rabbit.

“Excuse me, that person –”

“Hmm?”

Judging from how she kept staring at Nageki with a worried

expression, Mitaka guessed she might be Nageki's relative.

Would she be the girl he was looking for? Mitaka has the ability to sense supernatural powers, and he knew she was a monster –

No, she was something even more horrendous. And yet, looking at her face, which was on the verge of crying, he could not contemplate that any further.

Then something even more incredible happened. The girl did not touch Nageki, but he started to float in mid-air and slid smoothly to float next to her.

"I'll carry Kurukiyo." The girl muttered as if talking to herself.

"This feels like – our last farewell. You're so stupid. You're so weak, and you're already wounded, but you still came to such a place…"

The girl started to sob. Mitaka couldn't help but pat her head, then he opened the glass door and walked towards Mina.

Behind Mitaka, Guriko and Sakaki stared at each other and conversed as if they were lovers who parted many years ago.

"How is Rinne?"

"Same as ever. Did you get any useful information?"

"No. I'm sorry. I'm really useless… and I always leave you to suffer on your own."

That was the first time Mitaka heard Gankyū Eguriko speaking so much like a human. It was so helpless, so emotional – did she realize that herself?

Mitaka decided not to dwell on it and smashed the glass jar that housed Mina's head. Mina complained that his methods were so crude, but the eagerness in his heart didn't allow him to wait.

He apologized to Mina, but his mind was not thinking of her at all.

It had only been a little while, but it felt like they had not met for a long while. Wearing a dress, she looked like a slender little doll. He walked towards her.

"Tatsue."

He shook her shoulders and called firmly to her.

“Tatsue, Tatsue!”

“Mmmm, errrr…” She moaned painfully and blinked: “Mi… Taka…”

Mitaka took hold of her shoulders and helped her sit up. She smiled vaguely, as if still in the land of dreams.

“Is this a dream? Or is this… reality?”

Then he hugged her gently. She felt so warm.

She returned the hug tightly as if confirming his presence, then she made a relieved sigh and said softly: “Ahh, looks like this isn’t a dream after all.”

She stood up with him and looked straight at Mitaka.

Different from the forced impression she usually donned, an inner nobility seemed to permeate out of her being.

“I’ve – I’ve always believed in you. I believed you’d come to me. I believe in you, the person who would appear like the wind every time I cried in the past and help me to eliminate the root of my worries.”

“Tatsue… I…”

Mitaka’s expression became serious. *I am not Takamikado Mitaka. I am a monster who ate the corpse of that person, who was so important to you. I cannot live together with humans.*

Just as Mitaka lowered his head and was going to tell her this –

“Mitaka-chan, you’re such an idiot.”

She addressed Mitaka as she used to do and pressed her lips to his.

She stayed there for about a second before separating. She smiled shyly as her entire face blushed.

“You didn’t stick to our promise and didn’t become an awesome person. You were getting worse and worse, more and more stupid – so I fell in love with Mister Snake, who borrowed your body.”

“Tatsue?”

Mitaka called out to her, but she blushed to the tips of her ears and turned around, walking out of the small room and moved towards Sakaki and the others, who were talking together.

“Oh dear? Why would Guryu onii-san come to a place like this?”

“Tatsue.”

Sakaki looked at Mitaka, who was still standing dazed, and Tatsue, and said softly with a defeated expression: “Say, don’t act so intimately in front of other people. It’s shameful.”

“Look who’s talking! I know all about you, and the daily life of Guryū onii-san with Usagawa Rinne: for example, the two of you would sweetly eat her homemade lunch in front of other people – at school of all places. That is unacceptable! I am so hurt! My love is pure!”

Tatsue said this with a loud voice as if she were getting a heavy burden off her chest, and she had on an uncertain expression.

Yet Mitaka – who held Mina in his hands – and Sakaki, Guriko, the young girl, and Sakaki and even Tatsue herself –

– They all ignored this and turned to Dullahan, who tirelessly fought against the darkness.

“Is Ki-chan in there?”

“Indeed. This black stuff came from that direction. I was originally locked inside a cell there with Mitsuki.”

Mitaka added as Tatsue nodded.

Suddenly, Mina did her best to put on a cold expression, and said to the others: “That’s fine – everything will end here. You should all leave.”

Her words surprised Mitaka. Tatsue also looked at her with a deep frown.

“What do you mean?”

Mina smiled and replied in a very even tone, as if hiding her true thoughts: “Both my sister and I were already dead since a few years ago. We were forced into the ‘roles’ of God and had no choice but to be resurrected – those of you still alive should not put your lives in danger for the dead… at least that’s what I think.”

The end of Mina’s speech became vague and she faced Mitaka and Tatsue, who were both staring at her. Her expression also became annoyed. It seemed she may have wanted to leave Mitaka and everyone else in a cold-hearted manner and allow them to escape.

Mina sighed and closed one eye.

“The chances of Ki-chan being saved is close to zero. Not only that, saving her can endanger your lives. Do you understand this? Fate is not so simple that it can be changed by friendship, love, or sense of duty.”

Mitaka said firmly to Mina: “I’m here already, so how can I turn back when I’ve accomplished everything except saving Mitsuki? Besides, I still owe her a favor.”

“Because we are friends.”

Faced with Mitaka, who stared at her, and Tatsue, who smiled at her, Mina looked towards the ground in defeat: “Ki-chan really is a lucky child. I really want to tell her, that girl who used to always write in her diary that she’s not needed… Ki-chan, there are some foolish children here who will cry without you. Isn’t this happiness?”

Mina said gently as she looked at the armless girl and Guriko.

“Long-Armed Demon, Gankyū Eguriko, I’m swallowing my pride and begging you.”

Then she requested with a serious and ominous expression: “As an exchange, I will do anything within my power to help you. So help me! Help me save my younger sister – save Ki-chan.”

Guriko looked back at her silently. She then replied with a low voice that was more masculine than feminine: “Tell me everything once we’re done.”

Then she looked sideways at Sakaki and added with an honest tone: “And tell me the method to return Rinne from a Meat Doll back to how she was before.”

“I understand.”

The girl named Long-Armed Demon stood beside Guriko and Mina, who were staring at each other. She had a difficult expression on her face.

“Ah, Long-Armed Demon – um, that, that, what should we do?”

While Long-Armed Demon was being anxious, the black current ravaged on, almost life-like, and spluttered everywhere in front of Dullahan, who was almost defeated. There didn’t seem to be much time left for casual chats.

“God had decreed Fallen Angels should be destroyed. That is their destiny.” Mina fixed her gaze upwards and said decisively with a serious tone.

“If that’s the case, then I will change destiny. I’ve been played with by it for so long; it’s about time for me to get angry at it. God, you are an evil creature – and I will now make you open your mouth and cry!”

It felt like a line that everyone present finally spoke from the bottom of their hearts.

That red thread, which fed upon Guriko’s Apple and used her spine and muscles on her back as its soil, germinated and wove a beautiful pair of wings behind her. Not only did it make the wings, it also spread to her limbs. Every inch of her skin took on a texture akin to a carapace, and her energetic eyes seemed to burn with an inner fire.

Her form that came from consuming the Apple and displaying a power beyond her ordinary capacity could only be described as a portrait of God: She was both solemn and foreboding.

“I can’t last for too long. This body consumes Apples very quickly.”

Even her voice became lower.

Guriko turned to look at Mina, who was in Mitaka's hands. The left arm that Guriko chewed off herself was regenerating with an incredible speed, the tissues dripped with thick liquid as new skin formed.

Mina frowned as she looked at Guriko, but then she brusquely gave orders for Long-Armed Demon and Tatsue.

"Well - I need to take back Sterilization Disinfection's body. Long-Armed Demon, control that body so it can't move away. Tatsue-san, use your Dragon's Breath to stop that black torrent and don't let it get closer.

Long-Armed Demon paused a little, as if feeling awkward with helping Mina. However, when she realized everyone had a serious expression, she walked towards Dullahan as if she made up her mind. Tatsue hadn't fully recovered either; Sakaki helped her walk as they followed Long-Armed Demon.

"Mitaka - put my head on that body as soon as it stops moving. I'll then try to take control of the body and return Sterilization Disinfection back to whole."

"Got it, but - can you do it?"

Mitaka asked as he ran. Mina laughed coldly: "I don't know. But we have to try."

"Ahhh!"

Long-Armed Demon released her 'arms' and tied them all around Dullahan, who was fighting with the black malevolence like a machine. The silver mist from the spray cans paused, as if in confusion, and couldn't control Unpleasant Counter-Current anymore.

Walls caved in and the building shook. The pitch-black darkness began to draw near.

"It's hard to use it - without a fan - " Despite her uncertain expression, Tatsue still lifted both her arms and pointed them sideways.

"Dragon's Breath!"

The wind suddenly rose up and roared in a blast of power that scattered the darkness approaching them, so it would not destroy the area they were in. But that was the best she could do. The black substance moaned painfully as if it was alive, and moved ever closer through the wind.

“No… I can’t do it, I can’t stop it!”

“Tatsue-san, don’t be scared!”

Mina’s head screamed as Mitaka held her and planted her onto Dullahan’s stiff body: “Your opponent is the crystallization of malevolence and evil! If you’re afraid - then your terror will be absorbed into it and it would grow in strength!”

A creaking and grinding sound could be heard from the place where Mina’s head was connected to her body. The Greater Fragment temporarily located at the heart of Dullahan seemed to regard the consciousness Mina’s head was attempting to pass down as an intruder, and wanted to expel it.

Guriko flapped her red wings and scattered the mud-like, torrential flood. The scattered black liquid dissolved and burnt through her flesh the moment they touched her skin.

“Urk -”

Mina screamed at Tatsue, who was standing close to her and moaning painfully with an anxious expression.

“Tatsue-san! This is only a theory, but working from the fact that Ganhō, the person who worked with Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, is your father, it might be the truth - Tatsue-san, your body is the pre-prepared vessel for Melodia Noise
Tear Song
should an emergency occur!”

Melodia Noise
Tear Song
, one of the owners of the seven Greater Fragments of God, the one who played the ‘role’ of the Savior.

“The ‘role’ will not disappear if the body dies; it will not disappear as long as the Greater Fragment remains. Normally, the Fragments need some time to infuse a soul, but it can resurrect immediately if

there is a body already prepared and modified to fit it! That is what Melodia Noise
Tear Song
wanted!”

That was the truth of Tatsue’s incredible supernatural ability.

“Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
, who has the power to alter physical forms and modify human bodies, modified your body without you realizing it! Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
and Melodia Noise
Tear Song
are cooperating with each other - and Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s cowardice is infamous. I won’t be surprised even if she did prepare a body for herself to use in advance of emergencies!”

Mina said softly, as if laughing: “Sakaki Ganhō - he probably received Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s assistance on the condition of having your body modified for her… I don’t know the details, but this is the truth: your body has the same ability as Melodia Noise
Tear Song
.”

Tatsue’s body was the substitute flesh for Melodia Noise
Tear Song
in case of an emergency -

If she used this ability without a Fragment, then she would use up her soul and exhaust herself. This did not contradict with what Tatsue heard from Mitsuki and Mina. However, after having eaten Mitsuki’s arm, she gained large amounts of energy.

“Ki-chan did say your ability is incomplete, no? Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s ability isn’t something as simple as flowing air and stirring up a storm.” Mina stared directly at Tatsue.

“Her ability involves controlling and manipulating space and air. Melodia Noise

Tear Song
is omniscient by virtue of controlling space and knowing everything within these spaces. She can also manipulate air as she wishes, sometimes changing sound, sometimes stirring up a storm."

That was Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's true ability. So far, Tatsue had only used a part of Melodia Noise
Tear Song
's true power.

"You mean - " Tatsue didn't hear all of it. She tried to spread her hands, as a serious expression surfaced on her face. "Twist the flow of air like this -"

"tap, tap, tap." She tapped a beat with her feet.

This was her unconscious habit from when she played the violin or the piano and had had to keep beat with the music.

Tatsue tried to focus after being told of her true ability.

She could interpret the flow of air even with her eyes closed.

The torrent of malevolence produced by the Unpleasant Counter-Current as she became a fallen angel seemed to be a liquid. It splattered into droplets and flew in a sticky matter, flowing like a fountain.

Twisting the flow of air should be enough to manipulate the liquid's movement and flow.

Tatsue gave out a low roar and drew on all of her stored power. For Tatsue, who had lived like a doll all her life, the short happy moments that she spent with Mitsuki and Mina and Mitaka was a miraculous time that seemed so rich and full.

Mitsuki laughed so cheerfully, Mina deliberately played pranks on me, Mitaka guarded me so tenderly.

Although it was only a short time.

That was the first time I had felt such warmth since I was born.

That period of time I passed with friends, that incomparable time.

Those times. That incomparable happiness.

I still want to experience more of that with everybody.

“Ahhhh!” Tatsue screamed as she displayed Melodia Noise
Tear Song
‘s true power at last.

The black droplets that had spluttered their way forward like a plume of sulfuric acid seeking to corrode metal and melt skin froze in mid-air and dropped to the ground. The black torrent that towered near them as if to crush Tatsue halted, as if met with an invisible wall.

The power of miracles controlled by Melodia Noise
Tear Song
was to control and manipulate space.

Angels have never harmed the Savior in the Bible.

She twisted the flow of air and meticulously manipulated space in order to protect everyone from Unpleasant Counter-Current’s intrusion.

Tatsue felt a huge rush of exhaustion incomparable to using Dragon’s Breath and her breathing became faster and faster.

But her expression was still some firm and genuine emotions flew out of her unblinking eyes.

“Well done - Tatsue-san!”

Dullahan’s body convulsed and Mina stared straight ahead: “And now - obey me!”

Dullahan’s body suddenly lost all its support like a puppet with its strings cut, and was propped up just by Long-Armed Demon’s ‘arms’.

The unmoving body stalled mid-air looked like a corpse.

“That should do it, Long-Armed Demon.” Mina immediately took back her body and smiled elegantly.

“Suppression successful. It’s feeling a bit restless, so I may lose control again. It should be enough for now. I’m going in!”

“Hehehe, I feel so happy! Everyone is trying their best!”

Long-Armed Demon smiled and punched straight towards the wall in front of them. The black liquid immediately gashed out like a punctured water tank, and surged towards them as if intending to swallow them all.

“Well -”

Mina moved her fingers as if confirming her mobility and smiled.

“Oho - it’s so much more convenient to be in a normal body! Also, either Ultimate Shield
The Weakest
or Melodia Noise
Tear Song
or someone in this Institute had replenished the power of the Fragment for me…”

Shhhhh.

Then she shook her spray can and declared with a mean voice:
“TYPE-A - Genocide Justice
Annihilation Mist
.”

The silver mist that swelled out immediately engulfed and destroyed the darkness coming right towards it.

Mina - the digestive organ that destroyed everything, the monster from the legend of Noah’s Ark, Sterilization Disinfection - laughed out loud.

“Fixing an existence. Removing an existence. Ki-chan - I will help you to remove all the sins that took control of your body!”

Large amounts of mist, incomparable to what she used before, swelled out of her spray cans as she made this declaration.

“Gankyū Eguriko, Tatsue-san! My mist floats in the air. Hurry and use the wind to control Genocide Justice
Annihilation Mist
, and don’t allow the approaching Unpleasant Counter-Current to come this way!”

“Got it!”

Tatsue prayed, oblivious to all else. Guriko showed a conflicted

expression and smiled: “Didn’t think I’d ever fight beside you.”

At the same time, the Sterilization Disinfection that was spread wide by the vicious winds fought valiantly against Unpleasant Counter-Current.

Tatsue seemed determined to stay fixed at this safe spot. She had a determined expression as she manipulated space to stop the black torrent from invading this temporary sanctuary.

Mina yelled as she sprayed out more mist: “Long-Armed Demon, Mitsuki should be somewhere in there! Please - find her!”

“Huh, you want me to put my hand inside this mud?”

Long-Armed Demon had a brief disgusted expression, but then she smiled like she was giving up: “Fine. Helping people is happier than killing people.”

Then she stretched out her invisible arms from the safe area that Tatsue guarded and dipped them into the world of the Unpleasant Counter-Current, a mysterious and dark world like the depths of the ocean.

“Um, eaaaaa, mmm - ahhh, I wouldn’t have agreed if I knew it’d be like this. This feels disgusting, disgusting - ” Long-Armed Demon immediately said those discouraging words and twisted up her expression.

“Malevolence? Envy? Hatred? Terror? What is all this? These disgusting emotions are crawling up Long-Armed Demon’s arms, aaaaaah! Someone, someone come and - do this instead of Long-Armed Demon!”

Long-Armed Demon’s ‘arms’ were her Apple, the power of her soul. Having sunk her ‘arms’ straight into the ocean of Unpleasant Counter-Current, she could feel her soul being stained.

“Please hold on, Long-Armed Demon! You’re the only one who can do it!” Mina tried her best and yelled out loud, but Long-Armed Demon was almost crying.

“Even, even if you say that… I can’t, can’t hold on anymore!”

Long-Armed Demon kept shaking her head, beginning to falter. Nageki Kurukiyo, who was propped up by Mitaka and stood next to

her, half-opened his eyes and looked at her: “Ume-chan, I don’t know what’s going on - but you’ll be fine. Just think about how ashamed you were when we went out for a walk together with you wearing that collar. Once you’ve been through that, there’s nothing on earth that you can’t endure.”

“Ahhhh don’t talk about that, don’t talk about it - wahhhhh! Damn it! Everyone will be defeated and die anyways if the time’s up! I won’t die! Long-Armed Demon won’t die before she revenges herself on this pervert!”

“Ume-chan even tried to explain to passers-by who looked at us funny. You said ‘no! I just like to pretend to be a dog!’ Ahahaha, that won’t convince anyone at all.”

“AAAAAAHHH! Long-Armed Demon is really going to kill Kurukiyo later! Long-Armed Demon needs to finish this quickly and get back!”

For some reason, Long-Armed Demon suddenly became full of energy and released more ‘arms’, throwing them into the area dominated by the darkness. Everyone looked at Nageki with a puzzled expression, and he proceeded to pretend to faint again.

What an unconventional detective.

At least this made Long-Armed Demon forget herself in her rage, leaving her with no energy to feel disgusted or scared. She screamed with unearthly tongues and controlled her ‘arms’ with a firm expression.

Soon -

“Yes! Someone’s here! I can touch it!”

Long-Armed Demon said with genuine happiness. Mina replied: “Good, we need to walk there - Tatsue-san.”

Tatsue was momentarily confused when Mina looked over: “Couldn’t we hook Ki-chan our way? It’s very difficult to move within that, even with my ability. I’m almost fainting just from maintaining this space.”

“No - “

Mina shook her head and her expression became pensive: “We don’t

know how Ki-chan's body is right now, and we can't forcibly drag her. The power of the Greater Fragment won't damage its owner, but she was toyed with by those people in the Institute and her body was perhaps already borderline broken. Alternatively, we may drag out Ki-chan's debris - then it won't be so funny anymore, right?"

Tatsue couldn't help but imagine that terrifying scene, and kept shaking her head with a pale face.

Yes. They can't guarantee that Mitsuki was now safe and sound.

Since she could be touched, that does mean her flesh is still here, no?

Tatsue knew Mitsuki was dissected by people in the institute and her body was severely damaged.

It was indeed a smarter plan not to move her.

Mina didn't look at Tatsue, but she said with a serious tone: "If the power of your Fragment starts to run low, you can eat a limb from any one of us! You can take your pick."

"That, that kind of things - how can I possibly do that!" Her face became more pallid and looked at Long-Armed Demon with preparedness.

"Um - Long-Armed Demon? Which direction is Ki-chan at?"

"Mmm, over there, onee-san. Right at the direction Long-Armed Demon is looking at. I don't know if it's Ki-chan, but someone is lying there."

Following her directions, Tatsue shifted the safe area built with Melodia Noise Tear Song 's power forward little by little.

"Everyone, be careful! Don't walk too far away. Please follow me! You will be dissolved if you step out of this area, and you won't even leave bones behind!" Tatsue screamed as she moved forward and endured the unending fatigue that kept welling out of her, as if she had just ran a long-distance course.

After all, if Mitsuki didn't save me, then I would have exhausted myself

and died long ago. I am willing to use up my soul, which she gave to me, in order to save her.

Tatsue walked one firm step after another as she thought this.

How long did she walk for?

It wasn't far, but her steps were as heavy as those going up a steep and precarious mountain, and she felt an anxiety that came from not knowing the end.

How was Mitsuki's body?

Was it really Mitsuki lying over there?

She was wounded so badly, cried so loudly, and was dominated by Unpleasant Counter-Current – would her personality have disappeared long ago?

Anxiety took over Tatsue's mind and she even wanted to vomit.

But she decided not to think about it and keep walking forward the best she could.

"Ki-chan…"

Unsurprisingly, they soon discovered the body.

What a magnificent sleeper.

The Bible recorded the beauty of the Fallen Angel that caused one third of all of the Heavenly Host to betray Heaven and follow its banner.

Mitsuki's beauty made one think of this arcane fact.

Mitsuki had swallowed Tatsue's Dragon's Breath and mended her wounds – did she preserve such a beautiful body due to having absorbed the power of the malevolence to heal herself? Tatsue forgot her current situation and shed tears of happiness upon seeing Mitsuki's unmarred body.

Unpleasant Counter-Current had stopped long ago. She lay there

with her eyes closed, as if merely asleep.

The endless black torrent was perhaps from absorbing the vengeance and evil that swirled in the institute, and replicated itself without limit.

Her own hatred had already been emptied.

“Ki-chan, Ki-chan!”

Tatsue yelled. Mitaka ran towards her. Mina also screamed.

Mitsuki’s clothes were almost all gone, and she was nearly naked. Her hat, tail ornament, and even her gloves were gone.

“Those gloves,” Mina mumbled when she moved to lock eyes with Tatsue, “were tools she created herself to receive malevolence, kind of like my spray cans.” She waved her hand and showed the plain spray can that could emit the mists of destruction.

“Those who inherited the Greater Fragment would create tools based on their own preferences and knowledge. We would then use those tool to indirectly use our powers, always being mindful of not using up the power of the Fragment. That’s what the spray cans are to me. In fact, the Sterilization Disinfection that triggered the myth of the flood back in the time of Noah – should not have used such a modern tool.”

“Sterilization Disinfection, it’s not the right time to talk sedately right now.” Guriko, who had kept silent till then, said in a low voice.

“You, me, Long-Armed Demon – and that Tatsue – all of us are near our limit. The same goes to this place. The foundation would soon be melted, and then the entire underground institute would collapse. Even if that does not happen, we would all perish the moment this safe area is breached. It’s best to escape quickly now you’ve reached your goal.”

“That’s true – ” Mina smiled. Mitaka took Mitsuki, who had her body covered by his coat, into his arms.

“I want to emphasize that I am concerned with the fact that Ki-chan had even lost the power to construct her gloves and is now deep asleep. Her soul was almost all gone – Unpleasant Counter-Current stopped not because Ki-chan’s malevolence had finished, but

because the power of her Fragment is dwindling.”

“That means –” Tatsue soon realized what that meant, and her expression became sad.

Mina’s expression became serious and didn’t let Tatsue finish.

“Yes. At this rate, Ki-chan will soon die of exhaustion. But if the power of her Fragment is replenished, Unpleasant Counter-Current will start again… How can this be.” She mumbled angrily and stomped the ground forcibly.

How can something this cruel happen?

Tatsue tried her best to clear up her shaken thoughts.

Mitsuki’s Unpleasant Counter-Current stopped purely because her energy – her soul – was almost finished. She appeared to have fainted, so was her personality still that of the fallen angel?

Ki-chan will crumble and die at this rate.

But if her Fragment is given power, then the malevolent torrent will start to swell out again until the Fragment is spent.

Death, or recreate Unpleasant Counter-Current: they can only choose one of these two worst possible options.

Can humans really never win against God? Never able to go against destiny?

“Don’t screw with me!” Mina swore and hugged Mitsuki’s body tightly. She then took out a spray can that was different to the one before.

“TYPE-B Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
. I’ll have to use this.”

She silently caressed the area around Mitsuki’s heart, where her almost drained Fragment resided.

“The power of Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
is to fix matter. Those affected by Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
will be forever frozen unless I command otherwise.” Mina’s face

was full of pain and she sighed painfully.

She spoke sedately with a hoarse voice. Her tone, full of regret, was unimaginable from her usual unperturbed attitude.

“I will – freeze Ki-chan in her current state.”

Briefly, no one understood what Mina said. No one responded.

Mina gritted her teeth and continued as if she was about to spit blood: “I will keep her like this until I find a way to save Ki-chan.”

She cursed in hatred: “This is the only way to both keep Ki-chan alive and stop Unpleasant Counter-Current from continuing to rampage.”

“But –” Tatsue’s frowned deeply and shook her pallid face: “Is, is this the only way?”

Tatsue surveyed her surroundings.

She looked at Gankyū Eguriko, who resembled a portrait of God Himself. She looked at Mina and Long-Armed Demon, who has supernatural powers. She then looked at Sakaki, Nageki – and finally at Mitaka. She screamed with a voice mixed with tears.

“This – is there no other way? Everyone, is there no other way –”

Mina clutched her hands into fists and said with a resolute expression, as if convincing herself: “I will carry Ki-chan once I have concretely fixed every atom in Ki-chan’s body in its present state. Ki-chan will be preserved while she was still alive, so she can escape death.”

Everyone wracked their brains for some other method, something miraculous that might flawlessly save Mitsuki. But their time was up. The structure around them started to moan and shiver, as if it was going to collapse at this instant. At the same time, innumerable small cracks started to appear on Mitsuki’s beautiful body.

“She’s started to crumble – I’m sorry, Ki-chan, I’m sorry.”

Mina cried – not as Sterilization Disinfection, but as a human who

loved her younger sister.

“I…I couldn’t do anything for you. It’s such a disgrace. I’m such a useless older sister, I’m so sorry. Ahhh… if it wasn’t for me – you might have lived as an ordinary human and wouldn’t have to have become some Unpleasant Counter-Current. I caused you to be like this… I hurt you – such misfortunes –” Mina didn’t finish. She bit her lower lip so hard it drew blood. Suddenly, a voice replied to her.

It was a soft and weak voice that was wavering. They couldn’t recognize the voice at first.

“My big sis, is a nurse.”

It was Mitsuki sleep-talking calmly. Her conscious was slipping away, and her eyes were half open.

“She worked diligently everyday, everyday – trying hard, working, helping… many people. Big sis – I look up to you, I worship you. I… can’t help anyone. I’m just a human who can’t do anything.” Mitsuki said with a smile.

She wasn’t talking to anyone. Most likely she couldn’t even retain her consciousness, so she was speaking to herself.

This was a girl praying to God in her last confession. This wasn’t the Angel, or the Fallen Angel, but the soliloquy of the girl named Saibara Mitsuki: “So – I prayed, I wished…”

“Creak creak.” Fractures ran through her skin as if through ancient pottery. Mina screamed and started spraying Jack Jewel Fixation Mist from Mitsuki’s feet up, preventing her from crumbling.

At the end – Mina said sedately with a smile on her face: “If I die – then I want to become an angel, an angel that can help people.”

“Ki-chan –” Mina said as she wept tears: “Your wish has already been fulfilled. You became an angel. So – this time, you must live on, and you must have a better wish as a human!”

Mitsuki smiled. At the end, she looked at Mina.

“Mmm, then –”

She said incredible words. At the end of all things, she spoke seven naive words that illuminated a space being gradually overcome by the pitch-black darkness.

“I want to eat a chocolate parfait.”

You and Chocolate Parfait

It has been over two weeks since the events at the Institute.

“Phew.”

This feeling from so long ago, and this job from so long ago. Going to work was something from a life time ago.

She had more problems with disorganization than confusion, and made quite a few silly mistakes. Saibara Mina stood there in the pristine white uniform of a nurse and sighed, but it was not from irritation at her own carelessness or from tiredness.

This was the municipal hospital at the outskirts of Kannonsakazaki.

An enigmatic event where doctors, nurses, and patients had all mysteriously disappeared happened a few months ago here, stirring up a fervor where the public threatened to abandon the hospital. However, there was no money to build a new hospital under the current economic conditions, and so the hospital reopened for business after some simple repairs and renovations. As this was the only hospital in town, the majority of residents did not strongly opposed this move despite their horror towards the incident.

Mina used her ability to twist cause and effect, the miraculous powers of her Fragment, to obtain a job in this hospital, and worked busily everyday as a nurse. As an immortal, Mina did not need food and she was not desperate for money, but she really wanted to work.

Previously, she had become fed up with meaningless arguments between colleagues, difficult patients, and her strict but useless superiors. Due to that, she had stopped going to work, locked herself in her room - and starved herself to death.

Saibara Mina ardently hoped she could live everything over again.

She had lived as Sterilization Disinfection, an inhuman existence that held no doubts and dutifully fulfilled the ‘role’ of God. Mina couldn’t help but be upset at this. She rebelled against God, and decided to keep living as a human - as Saibara Mina.

Mina also had dreams, a desire to help those suffering from diseases and injuries - when did she start to forget that brilliant dream?

When did she start to hate everything around her?

She wanted to be proud of herself as a nurse, as the person Mitsuki looked up to, and keep living like this.

Compared to becoming God, the perfect existence, it was harder to live as an ordinary human.

However, Mina was enjoying a full life, something she had almost forgotten, as much as she could.

Even Mina herself was surprised about how she was not only alive, but living as a human. She found this to be wonderful.

"Oh?"

Mina was changing in front of her locker in the nurses' changing room at the end of her morning shift, which lasted till 4pm, when suddenly, she found a girl standing in front of the door.

This girl had an unique wolf-like hair cut and her eyes were cold as gun-barrels. As opposed to her left arm, which rapidly regenerated itself when she recovered into that divine form, her right arm had not returned from the annihilation wrought upon it by Mina.

Mina ignored her and sighed as she kept changing her clothes.

"You don't know how to knock, do you? You really startled me, standing there so quietly."

"Speaking of being startled, I am a bit surprised too." Skilfully diverting Mina's complaints, Guriko mumbled as she leaned her back against the door. "Sterilization Disinfection, you're working like a normal person."

Mina was somewhat repulsed towards the term Sterilization Disinfection, but it was such a bother to warn and correct the other over something so small. Mina answered vaguely: "What's the matter? I've got an appointment now. Please be quick."

Guriko nodded and said with a serious expression: "Tell me how to return Rinne to how she was before."

She glared at Mina with serious eyes: "You made a promise… don't tell me you don't know."

Mina quickly finished changing her clothes and looked into the distance: “Well -”

She put her uniform into her bag and stared at Guriko when she finished preparing: “There is no existence on Earth that knows the truth about this world.”

Guriko furrowed her brows in confusion. Mina spoke nonchalantly: “You should be aware of this after the previous incident, no? This world is full of incomprehensible things. Fragments, monsters, the Seven Kobitos, God… as a part of this, even we perhaps do not clearly comprehend these things.”

Mina, who was originally a human, had obtained more information compared to the average person after she was given the ‘role’ of Sterilization Disinfection. However, she had only grasped a small part of the mystery that filled this world.

“To be frank, even I cannot return a Meat Doll to how it was before.”

“What did you say?”

Mina waved her hand and stopped Guriko, whose killing intent had started to rise: “Indeed - it is far more difficult to remedy than to destroy. However, there are still ways to repair things that have been destroyed.”

She spoke that name quietly.

“Find Single Room!”

Guriko had never heard of that name before, and she put on a puzzled expression. Mina nodded and said calmly: “Single Room is the Greater Fragment with the power of Genesis, the power of creating the world. It was arguably the ultimate existence amongst us, the one who was the closest to God.”

Mina walked towards Guriko, who narrowed her eyes, and asked: “Do you know about the Mushi?”

Guriko looked incredulous when she suddenly heard this name

mentioned.

Mina said: “Mushi are rumored to be small fragments of the Greater Fragment named God Mushi Emperor. I’m not quite sure what their true forms are. However – I obtained the necessary knowledge to fulfill the ‘role’ of Sterilization Disinfection from the Mushi. That was definitely God Mushi Emperor’s ‘role’.”

Mina remembered the horde of red-eyed Mushi that had suddenly showed up soon after Mitsuki and her were given Greater Fragments.

“I was told of the existence of ‘Single Room’ back then, as one who holds the power of Genesis.”

She talked sedately as she recalled those memories. “Single Room can fundamentally overthrow the laws of the world including resurrecting the dead, stopping time, recreating dimensions – he is apparently an existence possessing these special powers. He should have a chance at returning a Meat Doll to its former state.”

“He? This one is male?”

A sparkle of hope lit in Guriko’s eyes.

Mina narrowed her eyes and walked to stand beside Guriko. She put her hand on the door, then turned to Guriko and shook her head.

“I don’t know. Single Room, who created the world, and Poison Catastrophe
, who created the Tower of Babel, are the most mysterious amongst the Seven Kobitos… we don’t know their age, appearances, gender, or their current locations. Single Room in particular seems to have been missing for hundreds of years.”

“You want me to go find something like that?” There was a hint of anger in Guriko’s voice, but Mina did not mind.

“It’s much better than having no hope, right? Besides, Single Room is also an existence that I am desperate to find. Single Room may know the method to wake up Ki-chan, whose future only consists of despair, from her frozen sleep.”

Mina looked up and walked into the silent hospital corridor.

“Therefore, Gankyū Eguriko – I, Sterilization Disinfection, Saibara

Mina, will help you the best I can in order to find Single Room. Keep in contact with me! And I will also tell you anything I find."

A spoon made a clanking sound as it stabbed into the ground next to Mina's feet.

"I actually hate you so very much. You killed Rinne, killed my parents, and you took away my right arm and my ordinary life. I really really want to kill you, Sterilization Disinfection." A tenderness was suddenly mixed in her voice: "But it's far worse for you to keep living in agony compared to being killed here and now, no? Therefore I won't kill you. I will never kill you – I will keep giving you the punishment named life until you go mad."

Mina smiled as she heard those words, which feigned malevolence but were words of kindness in truth. She turned to look at Guriko, who stood where she was and looked lost.

"Thank you."

"Squeak –"

This world was full of the terrible fates, deaths, and riots that came after God's demise.

There was no hope and no miracles. No matter what one gained, happiness would still slip away between one's fingers.

She originally thought of life as an unending darkness, filled with ceaseless agony, without even the hope of salvation.

"What…"

I must look very foolish right now. As Mina thought this, she stood where she was in shock.

Her soul had left her. Her consciousness had flown away. She kept blinking in incomprehension.

This was an ordinary shopping street in a mundane town, close to the Kannonsakazaki Private High School. In a corner of the street was an un-fashionable traditional cafe, and a girl was sitting in the seat in the middle of the cafe.

She wore large gloves and her dark brown hair were tied into pony

tails. She also had a round-eared hat and a tail decoration, exactly as how she had looked before she entered that underground institute.

Her expression was innocent and her movements naive.

I recognize this girl.

Is this a dream?

An illusion?

Or have I gone mad?

Or perhaps an attack upon my mind from a new foe? Is he is allowing me to see a happy illusion, only to attack during that time?

“Ah, it’s big sis.”

That person said with a gentle voice. She - Saibara Mitsuki - smiled like a blooming flower.

Mina’s mind was temporarily fuddled: “An enemy! There’s an enemy, right? Hurry up and show yourself. I won’t allow you to do something as cruel as this! You have touched upon my sore spot, me, Sterilization Disinfection! Fine - I will play with you! Immediately remove this deliberate and coincidental illusion and fight me face to face!”

“Mi, Mi, Mina-san, Mina-san.” Next to Mitsuki, who was scared stiff, Tatsue and Mitaka also had pale expressions and appeared as confused as Mina. Right. She made an appointment with both of them and the frozen Mitsuki at this cafe. At least she wanted Mitsuki to see the chocolate parfait she wanted to eat at the very end -

Mina walked brusquely over and leaned down quietly towards Tatsue’s face: “What happened? Tell me in three seconds. I’m almost crazy.”

“Huh, huh, Mi, Mina-san, please calm down!”

Tatsue looked at Mina, whose expression was terrifying, and stuttered: “Um, I don’t… understand it either. Just now, a boy rushed into the cafe - he looked at Ki-chan, and used a knife -”

Tatsue looked at Mitaka as if asking for his help. He added with

confusion: “Mmm - it looked like a cross. But its tip was very sharp, like a knife. That boy took one look at Mitsuki and muttered ‘so sad’, then he - stabbed.”

“He stabbed at the frozen Ki-chan?” Mitaka shook his head.

“No. He stabbed at his own abdomen.”

She didn’t understand at all.

She couldn’t understand either the meaning, reason, or goal behind him approaching Mitsuki, saying ‘so sad’, then eviscerating himself.

Perhaps Tatsue became more and more confused as she remembered the event? She kept speaking in broken sentences: “Then, those - blood, or bones, all slimy and glug glug, slid out of the boy’s stomach in an unbelievable way, and wrapped themselves around Ki-chan as if it was alive - was there light? I closed my eyes because it hurt, then - “

“I heard a sound.” Mitaka narrowed his eyebrows and spoke the enigmatic words the unknown boy left behind. “He said - ‘welcome to my room’.”

Room.

Mina thought of something and asked with wide-open eyes: “Then, as soon as you came to, Ki-chan had already returned to normal, right?”

“Yes -”

Tatsue nodded.

Mina looked at the sky and felt dizzy.

He returned Mitsuki, who had been near death due to the energy depletion of her Fragment when Unpleasant Counter-Current lost control, back to her former self? Besides, how had he removed Sterilization Disinfection’s Jack Jewel
Fixation Mist
that had fixed Mitsuki’s flesh?

So omnipotent that it was unreasonable. An ultimate power that was akin to miracles.

There was no mistake.

“It was Single Room.” Mina said as she gazed at Mitaka and Tatsue.

“What, what did that boy look like? I have to tell Gankyū Eguriko… I didn’t think he would be so close…”

“What did he look like -”

Mitaka furrowed his brows as if remembering: “He wore a strange T-shirt.”

“He had mud-stained jeans.”

“He had red hair. That was the only memorable part -”

“Fangs - no, he had cute baby teeth. That was attractive.”

She felt these answers were very different to the Single Room she had imagined.

Mina was confused, and asked with a controlled expression: “A little wild boy that like was actually Single Room? The one who created the universe… did you also notice anything else about him?”

She wanted any kind of information she could get.

He has the terrifying power to twist the laws of this world. It would be best not to assume he helped Mitsuki to recover out of the goodness of his heart. She could not calm down if she did not know the reason behind what happened with Mitsuki.

It would be meaningless if she only recovered for a brief while and will crumble again soon.

She waited for an answer as she thought anxiously. The other two both shook their heads in confusion.

“No. It was so unexpected, after all. I am very confused from the shock of seeing Ki-chan returning to normal.”

“Mmm. Also… that boy seemed to be chased by something, no? He immediately left after he returned Mitsuki to normal, and said something incomprehensible.”

Mina urged Mitaka with her expression to repeat those words.

He said these words to her without much confidence: “Something like ‘I felt the power of a Greater Fragment. I thought it’d be Poison

Catastrophe
, but I was wrong, huh!' - something like that."

"He seemed to be looking for someone?"

Poison
Catastrophe
.

Just like Single Room.

It was also one of the Greater Fragments that took on the 'role' of God.

Mina felt a cold shiver down her spine.

An unimaginable story is happening somewhere I do not know about.

Mina lifted her head and imagined God looking down upon them and laughing at their ignorance.

She endured the sense of dizziness and looked towards Mitsuki. Mitsuki propped her chin on her hands and looked very happy.

The expressionless cafe owner was holding that chocolate parfait with its lethal sweetness.

"Woah, woah this, this this, aah, I didn't think I'd be able to eat it again!" She then looked this way and smiled.

"Tatsu-chan, Mi-chan, big sis, are you talking about something serious? Is it fun? If it's not fun, then it's happier not to think about it." She made the first bite and swallowed it, then looked dazed.

"Mmm."

Two spoonfuls, three spoonfuls, four spoonfuls. She kept eating.

The chocolate parfait famous for its juicy cherries, cornflakes hardened with granulated sugar, and extra thick chocolate creme.

"Mmm! Mmm - it's so awesome!"

She ate with an expression full of happiness, then smiled at the three others.

“It’s fine, it’s fine. I don’t think God is playing tricks on us because He hates the world. I think He is trying to protect the world and is trying all sorts of ways to maintain the world. So even if we don’t think about those difficult stuff, the world would still be always stable - love and peace!”

Mina looked at her sister, who was yelling this out for no reason, and sighed. She decided to put her worries aside for now.

She had once been dissected and hurt by others and dominated by hatred, and yet she was still smiling happily. If she could do that,then it was the least Mina could do not to think about those anxious or depressing matters for now.

“You’re right.”

Perhaps one day plots, malevolence, greed, and fate will bring the entire world into misfortune, and us with it.

However, now we’re looking at the smiles of the Fallen Angel - the one who shouldered the duty of destroying us. She disobeyed God’s plans. Even though it wasn’t due to our powers alone, we are still not giving up and fighting against destiny.

Just like her, who survived from the most terrible Hell and is currently enjoying the small joy of eating desserts, let’s not think of difficult matters and enjoy the current moment with a smile. That’s what Mina thought.

Mina walked towards Mitsuki and hugged her from behind her seat, just like she used to.

Back then, when Mina felt happy she would smiled naturally and hug Mitsuki like this. When did she forget this?

No - she should be able to start anew.

“It’s good to be alive, Ki-chan.” Mina shed tears as she felt Mitsuki’s warm body. She asked her little sister: “Is it tasty?”

“Mm!” Mitsuki smiled exaggeratedly with her mouth, which was all sticky with the chocolate creme.

She was as optimistic as an angel, as if she could help others realize

that there was still hope in the future. Mina threw away all her negative emotions and smiled. Mitsuki smiled with her.

“I am so happy.”

Author's Notes

Hello everyone. I'm Akira.

I present to you the third volume of the Mushi to Medama series – Mushi, Eyeball and a Chocolate Parfait.

I have officially started to refer to many mythologies from this volume onwards, and I want to add and explain some things about them here.

The Bible.

The Bible is the most important scripture in Judaism and Christianity and is perhaps the best-selling book in the entire world. How enviable. The Bible used in Judaism is usually referred to as the Old Testament, and the Bible used in Christianity is considered the New Testament. In this series, however, I have collectively referred to both the New and Old Testament as “The Bible”.

By the way, the “Bible” in this series did not start off based on the true Bible. It was more a combination of various books such as the Book of Matthew and the Book of John, which all had different authors and were written in different countries and at different times. Of course, I also included the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha Gospels that were originally intended for the Bible, but were rejected by the Church due to their extreme or foolish contents. These Books were regarded as unsuitable for the Bible and were forgotten in obscurity. I have included a lot of content from all these different kinds of Gospels.

Due to the nature of such a Bible, the description of the Tree of Eden also varied in different scriptures. Some described it as the Tree of Life, while others refuted that and wrote it was the Tree of Knowledge. A third party would reject both notions and write it was a Tree encompassing life, knowledge, and sense. A fourth party would even go as far as saying there was never such a Tree to begin with.

Therefore, if you feel the description of the Bible in this work was different from the Bible that you know, please do not start contemplating upon the nature of the Bible.

The “Bible” mentioned in this work is a complete conglomeration of all the information from the Old Testament, the New Testament, the Canonical Gospels, the Deuterocanonical and Apocrypha Gospels, and the Pseudepigrapha Gospels.

Compared to these details, I would prefer you to consider something else instead.

Consider how this series might end. The Mushi to Medama series will end soon, and I am planning on a rather unique ending. Please try a little to predict the end. If you are sharp and perceptive, then you should have discovered something by the time you finished

reading Mushi, Eyeball and a Chocolate Parfait.

The hints are “Snow White” and “The Unified Structure of God and Me”.

I hope you may try to solve my little riddle before the end of this series.

Now for the acknowledgements.

I would like to thank my new editor, Satō-san, who is the Executive Editor for this series from volume three onwards. His efficiency and the quality of his work far surpass that of normal people! I would also like to thank the previous Executive Editor, Kindaichi-san, who stirred up the popularity of the Mushi to Medama series in all sorts of ways. Also the illustrator, Mitsuki Mausu-sensei, whom I have made into a model for the protagonist (?) Mitsuki without consulting her. And of course, I would like to thank the readers. It is thanks to you that we managed to publish the third volume of this series.

Thank you, and please stay with me till the end.

Akira

Translator's Notes and References

Minazuki: With his usual flair for names, the author used this surname "Mi-Na-Zuki" which literally means "Water without moon". Return to Text

Mitsuki: This name "Mitsu-ki" means "Honey Princess". Return to Text

Konnyaku: A Japanese gel/cake-like food made from the root of the konjac plant. For more see http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Konjac. Return to Text

Kudan and Kirigirisu: The name of Guriko's first companion, Kudan, is one of rarest mythological creatures in Japanese myth, a calf born with a human head and made prophesies about the end of the world, and dies three days after these prophesies are made. The name of the second companion, Kirigirisu, means cricket (the insect, not the sport) in Japanese. Return to Text

Berobōchō: Literally 'Tongue Blade'. Return to Text

Yōkai: Japanese demonic monsters. See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Y%C5%8Dkai. Return to Text

Kobito: Both 'insect people' and 'dwarf' are pronounced as 'Kobito' in Japanese. Return to Text

the Jimmu Emperor: The legendary first Emperor of Japan. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_Jimmu . The kanji used for 'God Mushi Emperor' and 'Jimmu Emperor' have the same pronunciation. Return to Text

the Kojiki: An ancient chronicle of the Japanese people. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kojiki. Return to Text

Credits

Mushi, Eyeball and a Chocolate Parfait
Mushi to Medama #3

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Translations: Baka-Tsuki.

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Contents were fetched from the translation group's site on 2015.12.12.